



‘Around the world three letters send a chill down the spine of the enemy: SAS. And those letters spell out one clear message: don’t mess with Britain’

Tories salute nationalism of Portillo

DONALD MACINTYRE
Political Editor

Michael Portillo yesterday reasserted his claim to the future Conservative leadership with a shamelessly theatrical appeal to the nationalist sentiment of the party's right wing and a promise to resist moves towards a European Union defence policy.

Mr Portillo's pledge not to

join a “single European army” and declaration that UK servicemen were ready to give their lives for Britain but “not for Brussels” came as the climax of a day that had seen the party at last begin to reunite over Europe in anticipation of the coming general election.

Mr Portillo emerged as the undisputed champion of the conference's first day with a speech that was authorised by John Major and which delighted most activists by invoking the spirit of the SAS, seeking to repel Labour's claim to be the patriotic party and witheringly mocking the EU's competence to handle issues of defence.

The Defence Secretary appeared to set fresh limits to tentative British involvement in moves already under way to increase European intergovernmental co-operation on defence by declaring that “it would be absurd, as some of our partners are urging, to try to merge our defence co-operation into the European Community”. The wildly enthusiastic reception for his

Inside

As for Portillo...
grown newspapermen
were slack-jawed and
white-faced at the
sheer gung-ho relish
with which he took
on the factual world
and defeated it
with overwhelming
verbal force.

Andrew Neill
Political Editor

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only on terms compatible with the “pre-eminence” of Nato. And he reiterated that Britain would respond to any moves towards further integration “with a cool assessment of where the balance of British interest is to be found”.

The Foreign Secretary derided the idea that Britain's insistence on protecting its own interests would mean a loss of influence or a two-speed Europe, adding in an echo of his Chatham House speech last month that “while influence is a crucial objective of foreign policy it is a means to an end, not an end to itself”. He amplified his speech – which also received a standing ovation – by making clear afterwards that Britain would resist any extension of qualified majority voting at next year's inter-governmental conference on the EU's future.

With Lord Tebbit, and even Norman Lamont, the former Chancellor, welcoming the recent shift towards Eurosceptic rhetoric by Mr Major and Mr Rifkind, it was left to John Redwood, Mr Major's challenger in the July leadership election, to press the Prime Minister from the conference fringe to go further by declaring that “Britain should not join a monetary union”.

Tony Blair, the Labour leader, said last night that Mr Portillo's “extreme, juvenile and ill-informed anti-European tirade” showed a

“complete ignorance of

Britain's defence history and

defence needs”.

He added: “Nobody in Britain is

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sparking fears of the

stockmarket crashes that have

historically occurred in

October.

Right: Michael Portillo, the Defence Secretary, saluting the Tory conference after his strongly Eurosceptic speech

Photograph: Reuter

Left: Tony Blair, the Labour leader, said last night that Mr Portillo's “extreme, juvenile and ill-informed anti-European tirade” showed a “complete ignorance of Britain's defence history and defence needs”.

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Britain to host Bosnia talks if ceasefire holds

MICHAEL SHERIDAN
Diplomatic Editor

Britain is to host a Peace Implementation Conference on Bosnia if the ceasefire due in Sarajevo last night leads to successful negotiations between Serbs, Muslims and Croats.

Continued fighting and problems in the reconnection of gas, electricity and water to the Bosnian capital delayed the final ceasefire announcement.

But the British, American and French governments are now so committed to the success of the peace talks that a schedule for negotiations, giving each nation a role, has been agreed.

President Bill Clinton, the driving force behind the peace initiative, wants the warring parties to meet in a secret location, somewhere in the northwest United States for a

round of so-called “proximity talks.”

If they achieve agreement, the scene will move to London, where the British Government will oversee a conference to discuss the task of the new Peace Implementation Force. British soldiers are expected to join around 25,000 US troops sent to Bosnia to enforce the peace, employing far tougher rules of engagement as they take over from United Nations forces.

Announcing the meeting yesterday, the Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, told the Conservative Party conference that the meeting would settle the role, size and duration of the force. It would also consider future humanitarian needs, assess reconstruction plans and organise future elections.

“The people of Bosnia will need help in implementing the peace agreement and assist

Now OJ Simpson faces trial by board game

JOHN CARLIN
Washington

You've watched the trial; you've seen the television movie; you've read the books; you've bought the OJ wristwatch. Now you can play the game.

OJ Simpson, who will be blessed NBC tonight with his first post-trial television interview, is said to be contemplating a civil suit against the manufacturers of a board game called “Squeeze the Juice”.

In the game each player takes the part of one of Mr Simpson's six defence lawyers. Players roll dice to advance around the board. The winner is the player/lawyer who collects the most cash from Mr Simpson.

While the game can last many hours because of “contempt of court” pay \$10,000 fine” square.

Squeeze the Juice is doing a roaring trade in California, where it is the most popular board game.

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OJ celebrity borrowed to make fortunes at Christmas

rupt and fall away. This can happen, for example, as a consequence of landing once too often on the “contempt of court” pay \$10,000 fine” square.

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news

Cromwell Street trial: Woman tells court how she was raped, assaulted and threatened by murder case couple

Wests 'told victim she would be buried'

WILL BENNETT

The victim of a sex attack carried out by Rosemary and Frederick West told yesterday how she was threatened with being kept alive in the cellar at 25 Cromwell Street, and then buried under the streets of Gloucester.

Caroline Owens was in tears as she left the witness box at Winchester Crown Court after giving harrowing evidence of how she was seized by the Wests, gagged with tape, bound and taken to Cromwell Street where she was raped and sexually assaulted.

Mrs Owens, 39, told the court that Mr and Mrs West were angry with her when she tried to make a noise to attract the attention of someone else who was in the house after the attack in December 1972.

She said: "He told me that he would keep me in the cellar and let his black friends use me and when they had finished with me he would bury me under the paving stones of Gloucester. He said there were already hundreds of girls there and that the police would not find me."

Earlier another witness, Elizabeth Agius, told the court that the Wests used to go out in their

car to pick up young girls who they might be able to get in to prostitution and that Mrs West went because they were more likely to accept a lift.

Mrs West, 41, denies 10 charges of murdering girls and young women whose remains were found at 25 Cromwell Street and at the Wests previous home in Gloucester. Fred West, who was charged with 12 murders, was found dead in his prison cell on New Year's Day.

The prosecution alleges that seven of the victims were bound and gagged and kept alive while they were sexually abused and that five of these were abducted while hitch-hiking or making other journeys and subsequently buried in the cellar at 25 Cromwell Street.

Mrs Owens told the jury of eight men and four women that she was first picked up by the Wests when she was hitch-hiking in Gloucestershire in the autumn of 1972. They offered her a job as their nanny but she left after just five or six weeks because she did not like Mr West and went back to live with her family in Cinderford, Gloucestershire.

On December 1972, she was hitch-hiking from Tewkesbury to Cinderford via Gloucestershire.



Rosemary West, right, and a report in a Gloucestershire newspaper of the Wests' conviction in a magistrate's court for the sexual assault of Caroline Owens in 1972

ter when the Wests picked her up again. She said Mrs West got in the back of the car with her and after they left Gloucester Mr West asked her if she had had sex with her boyfriend that day. Mrs West put her arm round her and started touching her breasts.

Mrs Owens said: "I think that is when Fred said 'what are her like?'. She started to grab hold of my grimacing and laughing, not a nice laugh. Then she started to grab me between the legs. He pulled up and

turned round in his seat and we were struggling with each other and I was trying to get her off and he turned round and started punching me and calling me names like 'bitch'." said Mrs Owens. She said she was then knocked unconscious.

"When I came round my arms had been tied behind my back with a scarf and they had tape around my head all the way round my mouth and the back of my head. It was a gag. Rose was holding me and Fred was putting the tape round."

Sometimes biting her lip as she relived her ordeal under the impulsive gaze of Mrs West just across the court room. Mrs Owens said: "I didn't think I was going to go home again."

She said the Wests drove her to 25 Cromwell Street, Mrs West continuing to touch her between her legs and there she was taken to an upstairs room where Mr West took the gag off, cutting her face with a knife which he used to remove it.

Mrs Owens said she was then undressed, gagged this time

with cotton wool and blindfolded. She was sexually assaulted and while Mrs West held her legs apart Mr West beat her genital area with a belt.

She said Mrs West then performed oral sex on her and later Mr West raped her when his wife was out of the room. She said that afterwards Fred started crying and said he was sorry he had done it. He said I was there for Rose's pleasure."

While her attacker slept Mrs Owens, still bound and naked, said she tried to escape but could not lift the window.

The following morning she heard another man's voice in the house and tried to make a noise to attract his attention but Mrs West put a pillow over her face and it was after that that the threat to keep her in the cellar was made. "I was scared to death," said Mrs Owens.

She was then astonished to be offered her old job back and accepted because this was her chance to escape. She went home and told her mother about the attack and she called in the police.

Earlier the court was told by Mrs Agius, a neighbour at the Wests' previous home at 25 Midland Road, Gloucester, how

the Wests used to go out in their car as far away as London looking for young girls to pick up.

"He liked 15- to 17-year-olds, hopefully she would be a virgin. They had the opportunity to go and live with them and be on the game if they wanted," she said.

Mrs Agius said Mr West

IN BRIEF

Call for global audit of thalidomide cases

A global audit of children born to thalidomide victims was urged yesterday to allay fears that birth defects caused by the drug can be passed on. Dr Nigel Brown, head of the Medical Research Council's Teratology (congenital malformation) Unit in London, said that a survey would go a long way to answering the fears of the first

generation of thalidomide victims.

The Thalidomide Action Group UK says there are nine cases where the children born to thalidomide victims have similar deformities to their parents. It also says other cases have been reported in Bolivia, Japan, Germany and Belgium.

Dr Brown says all the available evidence suggests that the defects cannot be passed on, but a controversial Australian doctor claims he has shown how thalidomide can disrupt DNA, the genetic code of inheritance.

£1.5m van raid

Two armed robbers fled with £1.5m cash from a Security Express van waiting outside a National Westminster bank in north London. They escaped in a white Bedford van after tying up the two security staff.

Postman jailed

Steven Watson, 22, from Collingham in West Yorkshire, who stole money, postal orders and vouchers from birthday cards during his delivery rounds to fund his heroin habit, was jailed for nine months by a judge at Leeds Crown Court.

Army base closes

The last "guard" from the 1st Battalion The Black Watch have officially vacated their North Howard Street base at the Falls Road in west Belfast, which was the first Army base established in the area when violence broke out more than 25 years ago.

Victoria Cross sold

The first Victoria Cross awarded to a Jewish soldier fetched £35,288 at auction in London. Corporal Issy Smith's prized First World War medal - won for his bravery during a battle on 26 April, 1915, at St Julien in Belgium - was bought by a private English collector.

Dr Peggy Norris

Our 17 July comment on the agony of the parents of baby Ian Stewart may have given some readers the impression that there was doubt about the medical qualifications of Dr Peggy Norris, chair of Alert, the anti-euthanasia pressure group. Dr Norris has asked us to point out that she qualified as a general medical practitioner in 1948 and was in general practice for over 30 years, after a period in a children's hospital in Dublin and working for the United Nations in Germany with concentration camp survivors.

Sticking to her man

A woman who superglued herself to her husband during a jail visit to prevent him being deported was told he could stay in Britain, but only for a week, after appealing to the High Court. However, Jacqueline de Marce, 27, from Gillingham, Kent, has been banned from seeing her Algerian husband, Hassan.

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Oftel warns BT to waive hacking bills

CHARLES ARTHUR
Technology Correspondent

British Telecom has been accused by the telecoms regulator, Ofcom, of breaking its licence, because it has let some victims of telephone fraud off their bills while demanding payment in full from others.

BT has only given this preferential treatment to companies that have bought the BT Meridian switchboard - described by one telephone hacker as being as secure as "a car which has no locks and just a switch for the ignition".

Telephone hackers can re-programme facilities in computerised switchboards over the phone, letting them make calls to any number in the world, for any length of time. The bills go on to the company's account. The Meridian switchboard was especially easy to reprogramme because its four-digit codes could be guessed easily.

BT became abruptly aware of the flaws in the system last year when a number of companies discovered hackers using

their system. One company with almost 50 external phone lines found that every one was busy at 4am as hackers exploited its weaknesses.

BT is understood to have subsequently waived bills run up by telephone hackers in at least four organisations, including an oil company based near London, a national computer recruitment agency, the British arm of an American entertainment corporation, and a large Scottish company. All used the Meridian switchboard. But BT has refused to waive a £20,000 bill caused by hacking at Technocom, based in Slough, which uses a switchboard bought from a different company.

Ofcom has now told BT it should grant a similar waiver to Technocom. In a letter to Technocom it says: "Not to do so would put BT in breach of its licence condition on undue discrimination." But BT insists that the waivers were "a mistake" and that its standard policy is to enforce payment of bills. It is contesting Ofcom's decision.

David Guthrie, managing director of Technocom, said yes-

terday: "BT is giving credit to these people who bought Meridian, and that's unfair. The money they give to them could go to reducing everyone else's bills."

He added: "I think that they gave a couple of people this waiver and that when more came along they realised they had opened Pandora's Box." However, BT insists that its policy has not changed.

Mr Guthrie wrote to Ofcom earlier this year. In November and December last year his company's switchboard was used by hackers, who rang in on freephone numbers and reprogrammed the switchboard so that they could call other companies, in order to cover their tracks, or make international calls at the company's expense. In a matter of weeks they ran up bills of more than £20,000.

A manager at one of the other companies whose Meridian switchboard was hacked into told the *Independent*: "BT never told us that the switchboard could be hacked so easily... It's the sort of thing you would remember."

Two others were immediately deported after checks into their backgrounds and the rest were detained at police headquarters pending further investigation. In addition, two Britons were arrested for shoplifting.

The 10-strong party was taken to Oslo for questioning after being stopped by police on a train at Sørbråten near the Norwegian-Swedish border while seeking entry from Denmark. At least one of the group is suspected of being a member

Britons held as Norway goes on hooligan alert

IAN RIDLEY

A group of nine Britons and one Dane suspected of being football hooligans on their way to England's international match in Oslo were yesterday arrested by Norwegian police.

Two others were immediately deported after checks into their backgrounds and the rest were detained at police headquarters pending further investigation. In addition, two Britons were arrested for shoplifting.

The 10-strong party was taken to Oslo for questioning after being stopped by police on a train at Sørbråten near the Norwegian-Swedish border while seeking entry from Denmark. At least one of the group is suspected of being a member

of Combat 18, an English neo-Nazi group believed to have instigated the riot that halted England's match against the Republic of Ireland in Dublin last Friday.

Under a new Norwegian law, foreigners can be deported if they have been convicted in the last five years of a crime that would carry a three-month jail sentence in Norway. The two arrested for shoplifting are from Newcastle and charges were being considered last night. All police leave in Oslo has been cancelled and around 500 officers - all trained in riot control - are on duty. They are being helped by officers from the International Football Intelligence Unit in London, who are monitoring ports, airports and Oslo's Central Station and are checking passports. Dogs and

mounted police are on standby. Some 400 England fans are travelling with the Football Association's official Travel Club but about 300 more are expected to arrive independently without tickets. "If they have no tickets they will not get into the stadium," said the assistant chief of police, Øystein Berger. "If they have no tickets and come to make trouble we have enough police to deal with them and enough room in our jails. We are quite confident this will pass off without trouble."

The England coach, Terry Venables, said that the team wanted no repeat of Dublin or the scenes during the last visit to Oslo, for a World Cup qualifying match in June 1993. He added: "It just gives the whole nation a bad name and it is something we want no part of."

All that glitters: Floral beaded tinsel-town dresses, by Giorgio Armani, shown as part of the spring and summer collections in Milan. The Armani collection was the final Milan show for the spring ready-to-wear season

Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid



All that glitters: Floral beaded tinsel-town dresses, by Giorgio Armani, shown as part of the spring and summer collections in Milan. The Armani collection was the final Milan show for the spring ready-to-wear season

Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid

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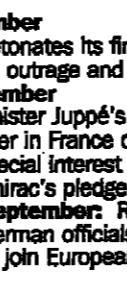
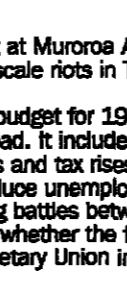
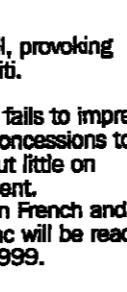
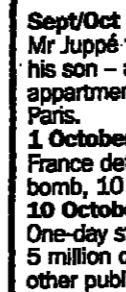
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FRANCE IN CRISIS

Bombs, boycotts and scandal: Six months of discontent from Chirac's election to a mass walk-out					
	17 May Jacques Chirac becomes President		13 June Chirac announces that France will resume nuclear testing in the South Pacific. Boycotts of French products take hold in southern hemisphere but also, more damagingly, in Germany.		25 July Bomb at Saint-Michel Metro kills seven people and injures 80. Slow investigation angers public but suspicion centers on extremist Algerian groups.
	7 September France detonates its first test at Mururoa Atoll, provoking worldwide outrage and wide-scale riots in Tahiti.		20 September Prime Minister Juppé's draft budget for 1996 fails to impress either in France or abroad. It includes concessions to special interest groups and tax rises but little on Chirac's pledge to reduce unemployment.		Sept/Oct Mr Juppé faces renewed accusations that he fixed low rent flats for his son - and publicly funded renovations for his own apartment - while finance officer for the City of Paris.
	1 October France detonates second South Pacific bomb, 10 times larger than the first.		10 October One-day strike by seven unions representing 5 million civil servants, local authority employees, hospital staff and other public sector workers to protest against 1996 wage freeze.		
MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	

Millions join day of protest over pay freeze

STEPHEN JESSEL
Paris

Encouraged by an opinion poll that showed substantial public support, France's public sector employees responded in huge numbers to a call by seven unions for a day of strikes and demonstrations yesterday.

Union sources claimed that 70 per cent of public sector workers - three and a half million in all - had taken part, seriously disrupting public transport. Education also suffered, with thousands of schools closed or providing nothing more than supervision for pupils turning up for classes. Other sources put the figure at 50 per cent of workers.

The Minister for Public Services, Jean Puech, criticised the one-day strike, the most extensive demonstration of union discontent since October 1986, as "immoderate", but Marc Blondel, secretary general of the Force Ouvrière confederation, which is particularly strong in the public sector, said that there would be further action if demonstrators' demands were not met.

The primary cause of the strike was the wage freeze announced by the Prime Minister, Alain Juppé, for 1996, although public sector unions also took the opportunity to show their discontent about pension reform proposals and possible deregulation.

Mr Puech said his "door was always open for real social dialogue", and claimed that in spite of the freeze, wages in the public sector would rise next year by 1.4 per cent as a consequence of automatic seniority increases and existing agreements. He also said the total wage bill would rise next year by 3.2 per cent. Other politicians on the right took a more forthright view of the day of action, with some denouncing the con-



Pillorying the president: strikers mocking Jacques Chirac as they took to the streets of Paris in protest at next year's wage freeze

Photograph: Nicholas Turpin

duct of "the privileged", an epithet angrily rejected by the unions.

Public opinion appeared to have been transformed in the space of a few days, with an opinion poll in *Le Parisien* newspaper showing 57 per cent back-

ing for the unions, against 26 per cent disapproving. Even private-sector employees and the unemployed gave majority backing to the protest.

By contrast, a poll in *Le Figaro* a week ago had found an almost even split between those

who said they felt solidarity with the unions and those who did not. In Paris, demonstrators took part in a march from the Bastille to a square near the Gare St Lazare. The procession stretched for two-and-a-half miles, and the number of

demonstrators was put at anything between 22,000 and 100,000. A worrying aspect of the demonstration for the government was the united front put forward by the unions, which usually find it difficult to agree a common approach. Mr

Puech said about 55 per cent of public sector employees had stayed away from work, but it was not possible to identify how many were on strike and how many would have gone to work if there had been transport.

The strike was solid among teachers, with the education ministry putting those who stayed away at 60 per cent and the unions claiming between 70 and 95 per cent observance. It was relatively lightly supported in the health sector, where only

about 14 per cent of hospital staff stopped work, according to the authorities.

Enormous traffic jams built up on approach roads to Paris early in the day as drivers, encouraged by the news that police would not be issuing parking tickets, tried their luck and took their cars to work. Many used bicycles, in spite of air pollution created by several days of unseasonably warm and windless weather, and an intrepid few took to roller-skates.

Main line and underground train services were badly affected and few underground trains ran, though the service improved later in the day, and about one bus in four was operating. Air travel was worse hit than predicted, with several airports in the south of the country closed. Little post was delivered, and most government and municipal offices were closed. Staff at the meteorological office refused to issue weather forecasts.

President Jacques Chirac, on a visit to Spain, said that he was confident that France would meet the convergence criteria for European economic and monetary union laid down by the Maastricht treaty. The freeze on public sector pay is part of the strategy of cutting the budget deficit to the required level by 1997. The deficit must be reduced from its current 5 per cent of gross national product to 3 per cent if the country is to qualify for a European single currency.

In Washington Jean-Claude Trichet, governor of the Bank of France, expressed his "total determination" to maintain the stability of the franc. After a survey showed a fall in consumer confidence, rumours circulated in the bond markets that European central banks had intervened on foreign exchanges to support the currency. The Bank declined to comment.

'Salaries not nuclear tests'

Paris — "Juppé out, Juppé out," shouted the hospital workers. "United we stand, united we win," screamed the banners of the postal workers and the police. "No to the freeze," shouted the teachers and "No to privatisation" declared the banner of the electricians.

The train drivers and the Métro drivers shouted: "Chirac, you kill us." And all across the city traffic ground to a halt as public servants took to the streets in the biggest demonstration seen in France for nearly 10 years.

Disgust at President Jacques Chirac's Prime Minister, Alain Juppé, who plans a public sector pay freeze next year, was clear. Workers carried posters of a "frozen" Mr Juppé, with icles hanging from his nose and ears. "Juppé, nous vous rechauffons," — Juppé, we will heat you up, said the banners.

But the outrage which spilled on to the streets yesterday was fuelled by more than simply

As Paris ground to a halt, Sarah Helm joined the protesters on the boulevards

concern over pay. Strikers emphasised their fears for the future, and questioned changes coming from Brussels which could force privatisation and bring in cheaper workers from other European countries.

France's public service workers were being "sacrificed", they claimed, for the sake of reducing the French budget deficit in time for monetary union.

"Money for salaries, not for nuclear tests," chanted the unions as they progressed down the Boulevard Beaumarchais.

"We are all Europeans," said Jean-Paul Dondoro, a technician in a geriatric hospital, who was marching in a line of white coats. "There are not enough doctors and nurses to care for the elderly. The Europe we want is not like this."

He added: "If Chirac want-

ed to save money he should spend less on defence. He should sell public buildings."

As the traffic jams built up, several onlookers scoffed at the public service workers, considered by many in France as privileged employees with jobs for life.

"It is disgusting, all of this," said Robert Marco, a taxi driver who complained it had taken him one hour to drive just a mile. "These are the most privileged people in France — they have job security, unlike any of us. Why should they have a pay rise every year? These are just the Socialists trying to bring down Chirac, but it is 10 years of their socialism which has left our coffers empty. We need Mrs Thatcher."

The discordant sounds of a trade union chant, sung to the tunes of Edith Piaf, pealed over the rooftops. "It seems that we earn too much. It seems that we are not wanted," the singer jibed, and the marchers yelped with delight.

The question on everybody's mind yesterday was what Mr Chirac would do next, now he had dared to take on the "vertebral column" of the French workforce, as *Libération* newspaper put it yesterday.

It was certainly a column of angry malcontents, whose warnings the President of five months will find it difficult to ignore.

French malaise bodes ill for Europe

This is no ordinary strike, Tony Barber explains. It has implications for us all

and Mr Juppé is that, whatever they turn, nothing but trouble seems to lie ahead. If they make concessions to the unions, the foreign exchange markets are certain to wallop the franc and there would be little faith in France's ability to qualify for monetary union in 1999, at least without some creative book-keeping.

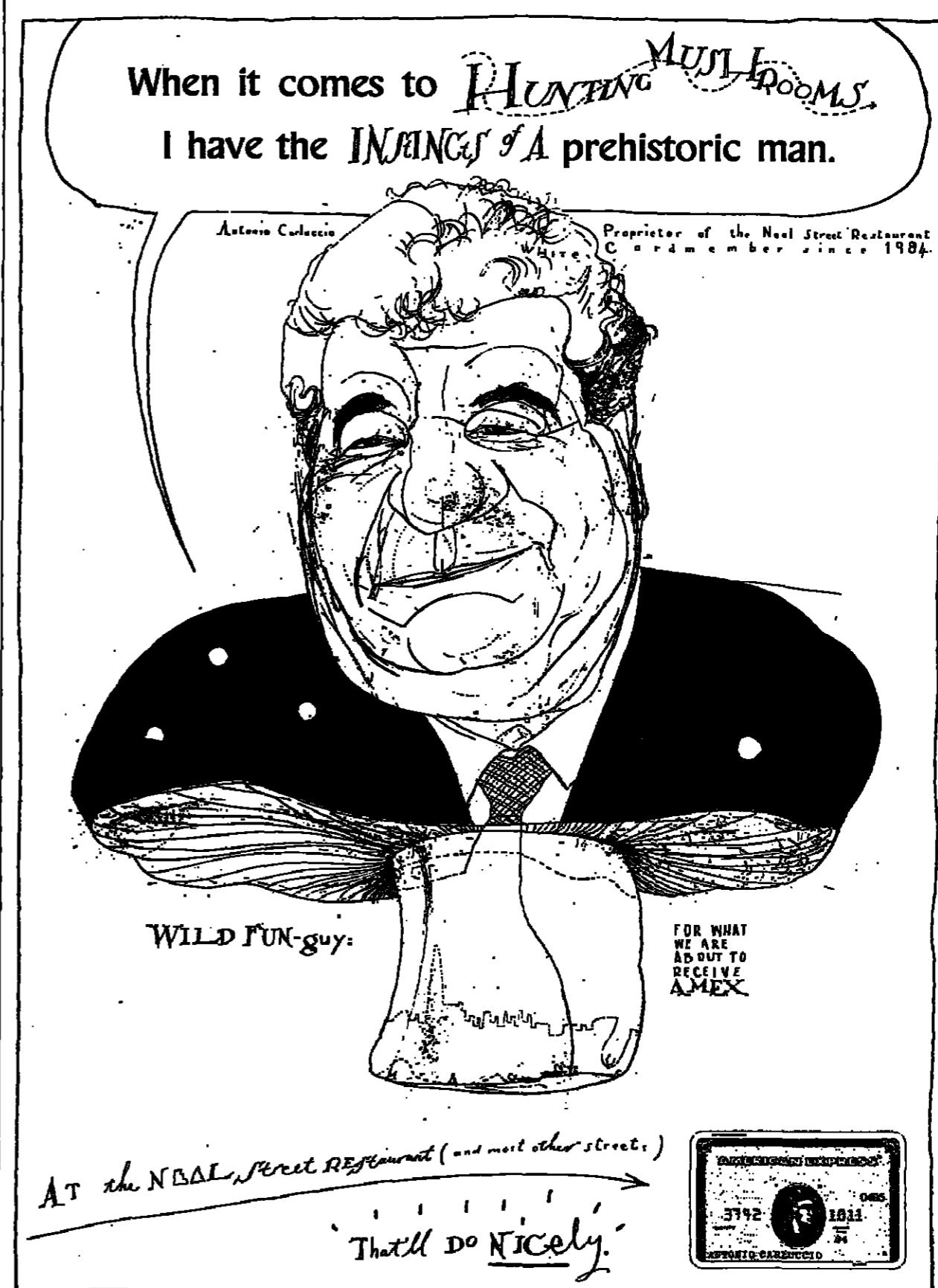
But if the government prevails over the unions and achieves its deficit reduction targets, then it will have carried out its programme at the expense of an unemployment rate at or near the current level of 11.4 per cent. The question vexing the markets is whether Mr Chirac is willing to pay that price for monetary union, particularly since he won election partly on a promise to make unemployment his top priority.

It is possible to feel sympathy for Mr Chirac, since he inherited both the Maastricht deadline of 1999 and the high unemployment rate from François Mitterrand, his Socialist predecessor. His economic policy options were in many ways limited from the moment he took office.

own making, notably the housing affair and the outcry over the resumption of nuclear weapons tests. The dismissal of Alain Madelin as finance minister, after only three months in the job, enhanced the impression of what *Le Monde* yesterday called "a lack of professionalism" in the government.

It is nevertheless startling that the president and his camp should be in such trouble so soon. The Gaullists and their centre-right allies control practically every important power centre in France, from the presidency and both chambers of parliament, to the Paris city hall and most regional administrations. With no national elections until 1998, the Chirac-Juppé team is theoretically in a stronger position than most EU governments to pursue tough, coherent policies. Instead, they seem to have wandered into a relentlessly expanding crisis.

Predictably, the word is going around Paris that Mr Juppé's days are numbered. The scapegoating and sacrifice of prime ministers is a well-established Fifth Republic ceremony, but whether it will do much to rescue Mr Chirac's policies on Europe and the economy is another matter.



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TORIES IN BLACKPOOL

Portillo lays claim to mantle of the right

COLIN BROWN and
PATRICIA WYNNE DAVIES

Michael Portillo reassured his claim to be the darling of the Tory right yesterday with a barnstorming address that flew in the face of warnings by the former Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, not to rail against false ogres in Europe.

Staking his claim to the future leadership of the party yesterday with a highly Euro-sceptic attack on Britain's European partners for proposing a common defence policy, the speech produced the longest standing ovation of the day.

Mr Portillo, Secretary of State for Defence, raised the spectre of the European Commission seeking to harmonise or "even metricise" uniforms and cap badges in a European common defence force.

He also passionately defended the SAS and lambasted the condemnation by the European Court of Human Rights of the Gibraltar killings. He said the Tories sent a clear message to the European Court: "Don't give comfort to terrorists."

His tirade had the hall clapping and stamping its feet for more and eclipsed the appeal of John Redwood, the former right-wing challenger for the leadership. "That is bad for Redwood - they love him," said one Euro-sceptic Tory official. There were hisses when Mr Portillo mentioned Brussels. "It would be absurd, as some of our partners are urging, to try to merge our defence co-operation into the European Community," he said.

Malcolm Rifkind, the Foreign Secretary, who also adopted a Euro-sceptical tone in the foreign affairs debate, promoted closer co-operation on defence with European partners, particularly the French, when he was defence secretary.

Mr Portillo declared: "There are those in the Labour Party and across Europe sleep walking their way along the dreamy road to a European superstate. We will not allow Brussels to control our defence policy. With a Conservative government Britain will not join a single European Army."

But there is little threat of a common defence policy - proposed by Jacques Delors, the past president of the European Commission - being pushed by the French and the Germans for the Inter-Governmental Conference next year.

Britain has led pressure for the Western European Union - formed in 1948 - to be the focus for European defence, outside the European Union.

Mr Rifkind pledged that any further erosion of British sovereignty would be judged on "whether there would be such benefit to the prosperity, to the security, or to the quality of life of the British people".

Labour's readiness to go along with what the majority of other countries wanted was the "new fault line in British politics", he said. After announcing the objective of a new Atlantic Community, Mr Rifkind told reporters that while France remained "protectionist", he had secured significant allies among other member states.



Point of order: A delegate signals his support for the platform during speeches at the Tory conference in Blackpool yesterday

Photograph: Brian Harris

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Sceptics are triumphant as the tide turns against Brussels

STEPHEN GOODWIN
Parliamentary Correspondent

Euro-sceptics paraded at conference fringe meetings yesterday in a mood of barely concealed triumph at the way they believe John Major and the Cabinet are marching to the beat of the sceptic drum.

The Conservative Party had put its divisions over Europe behind it. Norman Lamont, the former chancellor, said: "We are all Euro-sceptics now."

Along with Lord Tebbit, he welcomed the Prime Minister's assurance that if Europe moved towards federalism a Tory Britain would not go with it. Norman Lamont said: "I don't think there is any doubt that the Conservative Party has shifted decisively to the Euro-sceptic direction." Mr Lamont said.

Sir Teddy Taylor, MP for Southend East and one of the original sceptic voices, said the Government was changing its stance in the right direction - "towards public opinion".

However, there were warnings about the pressure the Government would face from other European Union states at next year's Inter-Governmental Conference over monetary union and common foreign and defence policies.

Mr Lamont urged ministers to resist the temptation to "coble together" some form of words to cover Britain's position. "We have found to our cost that ambiguity is fatal. It would mean one thing to the House of Commons and another to European institutions," he said.

Lord Tebbit put the Government's shift down to events in the EU as much as to the arguments of the Euro-sceptics.

The Euro-fanatics who are running Europe are making such a mess of it."

The strident calls of last year for a pledge not to join a single currency were replaced by a degree of relish at the difficulties confronting the project.

John Redwood, the defeated Tory leadership challenger, said even the German people were terrified of the "monetary monster" and were buying Swiss francs. France, already suffering 12 per cent unemployment, was being asked to suffer more in the name of convergence.

"The wags in the foreign exchange markets are right again. The best name for the new currency is the dodo," he said.

John Gummer, Secretary of State for the Environment, was one of the few pro-European voices on the fringe. The strongest was that of Andrew Rowe, the old "wet" MP for Mid Kent. He said the EU needed to be greatly overhauled after 40 years, but added: "I am not scared of pooling our sovereignty in order to make us part of a very successful future."

Addressing a meeting organised by Conservative Youth Against a Federal Europe, Sir Teddy accepted Alan Howarth's view that there were around 40 Tory MPs who would be happier in the Labour Party.

"In the same way, there are probably Labour MPs who would be happier on our side, because they are worried about giving up our democracy to the EU. We need to shake up the party system, because the parties are not reflecting the divides in our society."

Veneer of consensus covers the European conundrum

Europe has nearly destroyed the Major administration. Could it end up saving it? After a day of specifying and fringe meeting agitation on the future of the EU, the party feels more united than last year, and united on terms summed up in the title of a luncheon speech by Norman Lamont: "We are all Euro-sceptics now."

The argument is declared over, at least in the party. After John Major's leadership challenge, the hard-liners aren't going to push for more concessions from him. But most pro-Maastricht and pro-single currency Tories have been intimidated or argued into silence.

Only the indomitable Edwin Currie won't shut up; she has left it late, but she is in danger of becoming admirable.

Malcolm Rifkind and Michael Portillo were, though, surer guides to the Tory mood.

They both made fervently anti-Brussels points in their speeches, with the Foreign Secretary deriding the notion of "ever closer union" to which the Prime Minister had, after all, signed the Maastricht Treaty.

And so on. After 20 minutes or so of this, one could only react to his assertion that "war is messy, brutal and violent" by reflecting that, yes, it was, but no more so than Portillo on rip-roaring conference form.

John Major seemed to be enjoying it about as much as a dose of dysentery. But Portillo, after wobbling during the summer leadership contest, is back in favour with the party. He is the Prodigal Minister.

This matters for the country, not just the Tory party, because ferocious attacks on Labour's federal tendencies are so clearly going to be a central theme in the election. Once party battle has been joined, Europe will become a unifying thing for most Tories, rather than a dividing thing. "Brussels" seems to stand for everything party workers are viscerally

against. It is becoming as important a Conservative enemy as socialism used to be.

And the British argument is moving their way. Even at the Labour conference last week the missing words in every relevant speech were "monetary union". The single currency has simply disappeared. Tony Blair believes that monetary union will happen, if it does, late and will be driven by economic convergence and market interests, rather than the Maastricht timetable. Indeed, he thinks the political timetable is the problem. Anti-Maastricht Tories have some reason to feel self-satisfied.

None of which means that they have a convincing answer to the European conundrum. A small minority want to leave the EU. A smaller minority still want full federalism. But most are stuck uneasily between, anxious about the Franco-German agenda, short of clear alternatives. There is "variable geometry" and other unsatisfactory verbiage.

But what was missing again yesterday was any sign of new thinking about what end-point would be good for the country and for Europe.

Rifkind's speech assumed that European policy was essentially about reacting to other people's proposals: "In each case, we will decide whether there would be such benefit ... that it would justify the loss of

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news

Concerts under threat in war over stars

DAVID LISTER
Arts Correspondent

The heads of Britain's two best known concert halls were locked in a vitriolic row yesterday as the Royal Festival Hall was accused of using taxpayers' money to poach stars from the Royal Albert Hall.

Patrick Deuchar, chief executive of the Royal Albert Hall, said that the South Bank Centre, which runs the Royal Festival Hall, was using public subsidy to lure stars like Shirley Bassey.

They could afford to offer promoters cheaper rates to hire their hall, he said, because they used public money to do so. But, he added, this money was given by the Government to put on classical music and new and experimental work, not big-name commercial artists.

Many of these have been pop and rock stars. Among artists who have appeared recently at the Royal Festival Hall and used to appear at the Royal Albert Hall, are: Art Garfunkel, Elvis Costello, BB King, Joe Jackson and Ry Cooder.



Rivals: The Royal Albert Hall (left) and Royal Festival Hall (Photographs by Edward Webb). Shirley Bassey and Eric Clapton are among performers at the centre of the dispute

Mr Deuchar said yesterday: "I'm not concerned about competition as such, but it does become a bit unfair when an institution has a significant amount of public funds to fling about and they can offer sig-

nificantly lower rates for the hire of their hall. Shirley Bassey, for example, was a regular performer at the Royal Albert Hall, but now she has been offered lower rates to appear at this. There are a number of commercial venues in London

from large ones like ourselves to smaller ones, like the Shepherds Bush Empire, which face losing performers. The whole stability of the London concert scene is now under threat.

The Royal Albert Hall receives no public subsidy, and it is hoping to win lottery money for a complete refurbishment and redevelopment which would also be partly funded by box office receipts. Mr Deuchar said the Royal Festival Hall's

poaching of artists could harm these plans.

While Eric Clapton, who plays 12 nights each year at the Royal Albert Hall, is so attached to the venue that he would not be tempted elsewhere, nearly

every other pop and rock star who plays the Hall is open to persuasion. It is highly unusual for the head of one major concert hall to attack another publicly in this way, but it is a sign of the increasing competition among venues in London.

The South Bank Centre receives a £13.3m Arts Council grant. The general director of the South Bank Centre, Nicholas Snowman, said last night: "The Royal Festival Hall has always been in demand by a wide range of performers. In the past, Jimi Hendrix, David Bowie, Pink Floyd, the Pet Shop Boys and Frank Sinatra have played there."

The Royal Festival Hall is let commercially and will continue to be a major international flagship for the arts, providing first-class concerts for everyone."

An Arts Council spokeswoman said: "We are here to see that some of the highest quality art is put on at the venues who receive our money. But when we give the grant we are not specific about what they can spend the money on."

Royal Opera House 'elitist and wasteful'

DAVID LISTER

An astonishing attack on waste and restrictive practices at the Royal Opera House and other national companies was made yesterday by the leading classical music promoter, Raymond Gubay.

Mr Gubay, one of the most respected figures in the field, worked a few years ago with the Royal Opera House on a co-production of *Turandot*.

Yesterday he announced he would be mounting a £1m arena opera production of *La Bohème* next February with the Royal Albert Hall. He wanted to put it on there, he said, because places like the Royal Opera House and London Coliseum, home of the English National Opera, were elitist and used their money badly.

The rarity of such an attack by an arts practitioner was matched by the extreme nature of the language used.

Mr Gubay said: "The top price at *La Bohème* will be £37, compared to over £100 at the Royal Opera House. It has become far too elitist. People go there to be seen, for the interval drinks and for meals in the restaurants round the corner.

"In addition, there are methods of doing things and restrictive practices which don't bear scrutiny at both the Royal Opera House and the Coliseum. Stage hands are getting overtime paid all the time.

"But the nature of theatre work is that you don't work a

nine-to-five day. The Royal Opera House are definitely overpaying their backstage staff. Those guys get in some cases more than the performers. I know for example that when something is wanted from the props department two people have to go and they don't work again that day because they have left the theatre. The lottery award of £52m to the Royal Opera House was obscene. There is a need for proper scrutiny and accountability as it might well be wasting a substantial amount of money a year."

Mr Gubay said the Royal Shakespeare Company was employing "a bunch of actors, none of whom earn more than £500 a week. Why is the company getting all that money? There just don't seem to be the same controls and scrutiny that there is in the commercial sector."

The attack was added to by Patrick Deuchar, chief executive of the Royal Albert Hall. He said that a survey of his customers had shown they wanted opera in comfortable surroundings at reasonable prices.

He said: "There's a strata of society who desperately want to come and enjoy opera but the atmosphere at our opera houses is icy and dismissive."

A spokeswoman for the Royal Opera House said the practices complained of were no longer in existence. "We have the most efficient and cost effective personnel operation in existence."

Labour sets out defence strategy

CHRISTOPHER BELLAMY
Defence Correspondent

Britain's defence industry, which has halved in size since 1980, is facing its 'greatest challenge ever', according to a Labour Party report published yesterday.

Labour reaffirmed its commitment to a fundamental review of defence priorities and a strategy for preserving the British defence industry or converting it to civilian production without sacrificing jobs, if it wins the next election.

"The defence industrial base is a strategic national interest in both defence and economic terms," said Dr David Clark, the shadow defence secretary, launching *Strategy for a Secure Future*, the party's manifesto for the defence industry. "It's a preserve of high-tech innovation which Britain cannot afford to lose. Decline of Britain's capability in this field can and must be averted," he added.

Labour's review will examine four "core strategic areas": Nato and the enlargement of the Atlantic alliance; the strengthening of European defence structures; the role of the UN in international peace-keeping; and international security agreements, including the control of weapons proliferation. Labour advocates enhancing the role of the UN's peace-keeping operation and the adoption of a UN military doctrine - suggesting a permanent UN peace-keeping force.

The report says British defence expenditure has fallen by 28 per cent since its peak in the mid-1980s - the height of the Cold War. But falling expenditure has coincided with increased costs as equipment gets more sophisticated.

The report says Britain's industrial defence workforce has halved since 1980, from 405,000 directly employed and 740,000 overall to 210,000 and 395,000 respectively.

A strong defence industrial base is vital to the national interest, the report says, as well as being a high-technology preserve "we cannot afford to lose in economic terms".

The report acknowledges the Tory reforms in defence procurement which, it says, ended "the previously rather cosy relationship between MoD and its suppliers". But it criticises the failure of the Government to realise the "peace dividend" expected to materialise at the end of the Cold War.



David Clark: Commitment to full defence review

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Star

news

Tourists visit seaside focus of Disney Pocahontas legend



Light relief: Pocahontas's stain glass window at St George's Church, Gravesend

Photograph: Geraint Lewis

CLARE GARNER

Walt Disney has brought the tourists to Florida, France and Tokyo - now it is doing the same for Gravesend, where pilgrims are searching for the truth about Pocahontas.

St George's Church, where the Indian princess was buried in 1617, has experienced a surge of visitors since the US launch of Disney's animated film, *Pocahontas* in June.

The blockbuster crosses the Atlantic this week and as Walt Disney has pledged £9,000 to illuminate the church tower and Pocahontas's statue, the town is preparing for a further influx of visitors.

Disney has turned the Pocahontas legend into a romantic story of a beautiful Indian maiden who saves the life of handsome explorer John Smith and embarks on a love affair that crosses races and cultures.

In reality, though Pocahontas did save Smith from a ceremonial execution, she married someone else and was later kidnapped and taken to England where she became one of the early ethnic celebrities. She died before she could return

home and was buried at Gravesend.

One visitor, Dr Gerald Taiaiake Alfred, 31, from Kahnawake Indian reserve in Canada, was in search of what he called 'real history'.

"I was disgusted by the movie so I figured I should come here and see how they presented the subject. The movie is very offensive and racist," said Dr Alfred, a Mohawk Indian who lectures in political science at Montreal's University of Concordia.

As delighted with the memorial as he was disgusted with Disney, Dr Alfred continued: "I came here to see exactly where she is buried. The presentation here seems pretty objective. It is a simple monument which is not romanticised or distorted."

"If people come and see an Indian princess so far from where she lived her life it should make them ask questions about why she died here. She was a victim of the times. You can take it for granted she wasn't here by choice."

Dr Alfred welcomed the floodlighting. "It is a good idea if it brings people here to ask questions about the continuing



Disney's cartoon image of Pocahontas and, right, her statue at Gravesend

legacy of the treatment of Indian people, not perpetuate the mythology," he said.

Another of yesterday's visitors, Carl Lawton, 50, from Los Angeles said: "Pocahontas symbolises that there should be peace and harmony between all races." He too predicted a tourist influx. "Gravesend is too small a town to withstand it. It's going to get nuts."

Leading Article, page 18



Public school heads seek funding for more places

JUDITH JUDD
Education Editor

Public schools are talking to both the Conservative and Labour parties about funding more places in private schools, a leading public school head said yesterday.

Labour should subsidise local authority places for less wealthy pupils in independent schools, Hugh Wright, new chairman of the Headmasters' Conference, said at its annual meeting in Dublin.

Labour sources indicated last night that the party was considering councils buying independent school places for pupils with special needs and aptitude, but not chosen by academic selection.

Mr Wright urged the Government to expand the assisted places scheme, which helps bright pupils from poor homes to attend private schools, or to bring in some other scheme of government-backed scholarships. Independent school representatives are discussing an expansion of the 30,000-place scheme with Downing Street, which hopes the policy will emphasise the Conservatives' differences with Labour.

Labour has said it will abolish the scheme, which costs £10m a year, and use the money to fund smaller class sizes. But Mr Wright said: "New Labour is looking at independent schools in a new way."

In a speech designed to woo politicians of all parties, Mr Wright, head of King Edward's School in Birmingham, told 240 conference members: "I say to politicians of all parties that you cannot afford to be without us. The independent sector has 7 per cent of all pupils, more at 16-plus where places are most

costly, and if it were not there, the Department for Education and Employment's budget would have to increase by at least £1bn."

He made it clear that public schools were prepared to open their facilities to the community as Labour has demanded. "Our facilities can be had cost-effectively and for some pupils in every locality a place bought in our schools by the local education authority would save duplication and often help specialist talent to be developed."

Mr Wright said more pupils should have access to independent schools, not necessarily through the assisted places scheme. He said it would not be as expensive as it sounded.

He argued that the cost to the Treasury of each pupil's education was little more than if they were in state schools, particularly in the sixth form.

David Blunkett, Labour's education spokesman, said the party was interested in Mr Wright's offer to open up private school facilities but he added: "While we would be happy to discuss any proposals which the Headmasters' Conference may have, we are not in favour of an alternative to the assisted places scheme."

Public school heads should continue to give pupils a strong moral lead, said Roy Chapman, head of Malvern College, despite the fact that some had fallen below those standards since his similar call at last year's conference. Peter Hobson, head of Charterhouse, resigned recently after meetings with an escort girl.

Mr Chapman said: "I don't believe teachers should claim to be unique in facing up to the pressure put on people in all walks of life."

Magazine 'filth' under attack

Women's magazines have become so obsessed with sex that they should be consigned to the top shelf, the boss of a leading model agency said yesterday.

Lorraine Ashton, managing director of IMG Models, said that titles such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Company* and *Marie Claire* had degenerated into "filth".

And she warned that she would be urging her models to think twice before consenting to pose for the magazines.

Ms Ashton said: "We don't need to read 'How to have 15 orgasms' on the front cover of these magazines. It isn't education, it's filth. They belong on the top shelf. It isn't right to say that *Cosmo* has been doing it for so long that it is acceptable."

The 49-year-old agency chief, who was a top model in the Sixties, preserved her most withering criticism for a new magazine, *Dazed and Confused*.

She told London's *Evening Standard*: "I object to cheapness. *Dazed and Confused* lives up to its name, it is rubbish and I hope it goes out of business."

Ms Ashton added: "I be-

lieve girls and boys are being exploited by magazines for the sake of ever-increasing sales."

"To have a girl and a boy in a state of undress simulating sex is gruesome, as is driving past a bus stop and seeing a couple licking ice-cream off each other. A nude scene in the shower would be okay but there has to be a line drawn somewhere."

Her outburst provoked an angry response from magazine publishing sources who dismissed it as an attempt to raise the profile of the agency.

A spokeswoman for the National Magazine Company, which publishes *Cosmopolitan* and *Company*, refused to comment.

Rankin Waddell, publisher of *Dazed and Confused*, defended his current issue, which depicts a topless model licking a bloody axe. "It's a misrepresentation. We are not a women's fashion magazine but a style magazine.

She told London's *Evening Standard*: "I object to cheapness. *Dazed and Confused* lives up to its name, it is rubbish and I hope it goes out of business."

Ms Ashton added: "I be-



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BBC demands dominant role in digital TV

MARIANNE MACDONALD

The BBC yesterday began a campaign to persuade the Government to give it a dominant power base in the brave new world of digital television, due to start taking over the screens in two years.

The corporation announced that it wants total control of one of the six new digital frequencies – called “multiplexes” – which will provide the technology to create some 20 extra television channels.

A wholly owned multiplex would give the BBC far more power than it would have under the Government's own proposals, made in a consultation paper in August, to award the multiplexes to commercial middlemen.

That scenario could force the BBC to share a frequency with ITV or put the corporation in the humiliating position of having to negotiate with its multiplex operator on programming schedules.

Yesterday John Birt, the

BBC's director-general, said: “The digital age will liberate the BBC to provide a far wider range of services. But if we are to make an innovative contribution to the digital age as we did in the radio and TV age, we need a multiplex for the BBC.”

Mr Birt also urged the Department of National Heritage to draw up a timetable for transfer from the present analogue broadcasting system to the digital one, culminating in a switch-off date for analogue.

“We want a clear statement on a timetable from government, a process which leaves the industry in no doubt,” he said.

His comments came after the BBC submitted its response to the Government's consultation paper on digital television, which asked for replies by the end of last week.

Digital television – which has been compared by Virginia Bottomley, the Heritage Secretary, to “moving from black-and-white to colour TV” – increases the number of channels which can be broadcast on terrestrial transmitters by compressing more information into the same space.

The system, which will open up television screens to home shopping, home banking and, eventually, video on demand, will start from 1997 although it could take 15 years to effect a complete changeover.

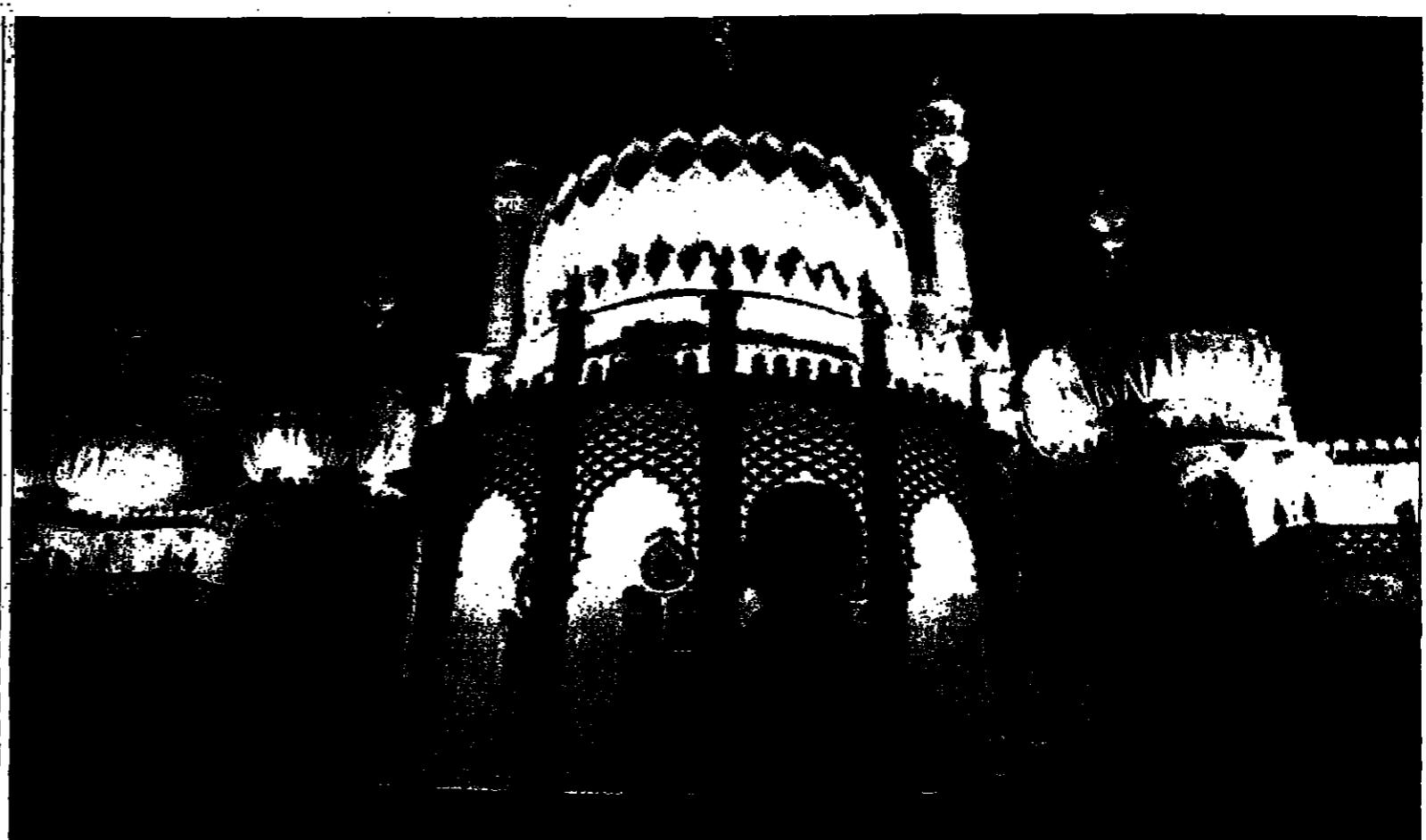
The existing stations – BBC1, BBC2, ITV and Channel 4 and the yet-to-be-launched Channel 5 – have all been guaranteed one of the extra channels created by the move to digital.

Mr Birt said the BBC would

take advantage of the extra broadcasting time to offer viewers increased sports coverage of events such as Wimbledon. Every summer, viewers complain when coverage is switched between the tennis and cricket.

The extra station would also allow a 24-hour BBC news operation, more coverage of arts festivals such as the Proms concerts and “gavel-to-gavel” footage of party conferences and key Commons debates.

A good example of the opportunities offered by digital was VJ Day, Mr Birt added. “With a single multiplex the BBC would have been able to show VJ Day events at length and at one and the same time from different parts of the UK.”



Seeing the light: The Royal Pavilion in Brighton, named as winner in the 1995 Lighting Design Awards

Photograph: Andrew Hasson



John Birt: Seeking innovation

Sting's adviser tells of shame over £6m losses

MARY BRAID

The rock star Sting's former accountant claimed in court yesterday that he hid huge business losses from the performer because he was too embarrassed to own up to them.

Keith Moore, 51, who is accused of stealing £6m from the actor and singer, said he had hoped that a series of risky investments – using Sting's money – would eventually become successful. The ventures included a chain of Australian curry houses and a project to turn Russian military planes into passenger aircraft.

Mr Moore said it was his job to resolve, not give problems to Sting. He said their relationship relied on “mutual trust”.

Mr Moore, who has denied using Sting's money for his own interests, insisted that once it became clear the money was lost he had been waiting for the right moment to tell his employer. He agreed with his defence counsel, Nicholas Purnell QC, that he planned to “sugar the pill” by telling him once it became clear how much he had saved the star in royalty negotiations with his record company, A&M Records.

But before the £24m saving emerged, he was confronted by Sting's lawyers. Sting has told

the court that a tip-off alerted him to the alleged fraud.

Mr Moore said he was ashamed about what had happened, but denied making any admission of dishonesty. “Absolutely not,” he said. “There was no wrongdoing.”

Mr Moore, of Fulham, southwest London, denies 15 sample charges of stealing from Sting's personal bank accounts and from a company account between 1988 and 1992.

Cross-examined by Ian Stern, for the prosecution, Mr Moore agreed that although he sent Sting regular statements about some of his bank accounts he never provided information about an account the singer had with the Bank of Scotland.

The prosecution claims Sting never knew his money was being used to fund largely unsuccessful schemes and that it was illegally transferred from Coutts and Company to Gramedia Investments Ltd through the Bank of Scotland account.

Mr Moore denied telling a bank manager Gramedia was his company or that the money behind it was his. He says that while the former lead singer of the Police did not know the details he had approved the “general principles” of the investment strategy.

The trial continues today.

Property prices keep on falling

House prices fell in nine out of 12 regions between the second and third quarters of this year and were lower than a year ago everywhere apart from Northern Ireland, according to figures published yesterday by the Halifax Building Society.

The province continued to buck the downward trend in the rest of the United Kingdom, recording another quarter-on-quarter increase in prices of 2.9 per cent, taking the yearly rise to 3.1 per cent.

Regional general manager John Donaldson said: “The stable political situation should continue to underpin market and business confidence generally. The factors which have contributed to lack of consumer confidence in the UK... are not having the same market effect.”

The only other two regions to record price rises, both of 0.6 per cent, between the second and third quarters were the West Midlands and East Anglia.

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مازن الراشد

NHS set to be biggest private care provider

NICHOLAS TIMMINS
Public Policy Editor

The National Health Service has become Britain's third largest private hospital group - and will soon become the biggest, according to an annual review of independent health care.

A dramatic turn-round in the use of NHS pay beds and the construction of ever growing numbers of private patient wings - some using the Government's private finance initiative - saw the NHS take 16 per cent of the acute private health care market last year. The figure represents a rise of almost 50 per cent on 1988, the year an historic decline in NHS private patient activity saw it take a mere 11 per cent of private patient business.

By the likely time of the next election in 1997, the NHS will have 20 per cent of the market, according to *The Fitzhugh Directory*. It is already the third largest private care provider after BUPA Hospitals and the French-owned group which includes BMI. The decision of the French group to hive off its central London hospitals means the NHS is likely to be the biggest provider of private care in revenue terms in the current financial year.

"The increase in market share is being brought about not only by the increasing number of private units being commissioned by the trusts but also by the increasing revenues which these units are generating as their familiarisation with the market increases," according to William Fitzhugh, the directory's author.

The top ten NHS earners all generated revenue of more than £2m with the London hospitals, Guy's, St Thomas's and the Royal Free, all raising more than £8m. In all, the NHS brought in more than £115m from treating private patients.

Private work now accounts for more than 10 per cent of income at the heart transplant centre at Harefield Hospital,

Hampshire, the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre, Oxford, and Wrightington Hospital, Wigan, which also specialises in orthopaedics, including hip replacements.

Another seven hospitals earned more than 5 per cent of their income privately including Oxford's Radcliffe Infirmary (5.6 per cent), St Mary's in London (5.8), the Christie in Manchester (7.3), Liverpool's Cardiothoracic Centre (7.6), the heart transplant centre at Papworth, Cambridgeshire (7.6), the Royal National Orthopaedic, London, (8.8) and the Royal Free (8.9). All saw increases of between 10 and 20 per cent in private patient revenues last year.

Less specialist hospitals with significant private patient revenues include the Royal Surrey County in Guildford (4.9 per cent), Epsom Healthcare (4.7 per cent) and the Frimley Park in Surrey (3.6).

Trusts are now marketing their private patient services "aggressively" and "the unspoken fear" among independent private hospitals "is just how far the NHS will succeed in penetrating the market", according to Mr Fitzhugh. "Could it really become the dominant force?" he asks.

Labour's policy on private practice remains unclear, he says, and after reaching a 20 per cent share of the market in 1997, the arrival of a Labour government would be likely to limit further capitalisation by the NHS on its "unique facilities and consultant relationships".

Independent hospital groups now appear resigned to slow but steady growth. "Not long ago, independent hospital operators used to talk of a large untapped market which they felt existed just over the horizon ... Increasingly, many are now accepting that this untapped market was a mirage," Mr Fitzhugh says.

The Fitzhugh Directory, Tenth Edition, 1995-96, 12 Riverview Grove, London W4 3QJ. £240.

Asthmatics' victory in road closure bid

Families of seven asthmatic children who live near a smog-ridden London road yesterday won the first round in their bid to have it closed to traffic on days with poor quality air.

Mr Justice Popplewell, in the High Court, granted them leave to bring a judicial review of a decision in June by Greenwich council not to use its powers under the 1984 Road Traffic Regulations Act to close roads when they are a danger to health.

However, the judge warned the families not to anticipate victory. He said the case was "just about capable of being argued and should be argued".

DAILY POEM

Poem

By Paul Bowles

If only I might live as many centuries as I shall years
My pleasure would be choking me
I should stand in the fleeting wind on a high hill
And watch the stars swim over me for years
At each rainstorm I should feel the rough earth draining away
Beneath my fingers like sand at the outgoing tide
I could afford to take years at each hill at each garden
I could lie at the oceanshore for the time of two lives
And watch the waves roll in and creep out
I should find myself in northern castles nights where long since
All is dead and the cobwebs waver in the midnight chill
I should crawl down stony glens at the edge a crystal sphere
this large
Could not kill my thirst
I should hunt out a planted slope high over the city at evening
And watch the lights and watch the shadows and ships and
the black
Islands and I should find a deep hot valley bursting with shadows
Of leaves creeping with life and let beetles and ants crawl at
noon
To see if I were dead I should spread my fingers fanwise in
the
near sun
And challenge it to shrink me or drain my fiery blood
At dusk I should listen for footfalls in the thicket of vines near
I should hold my breath

I first corresponded with Paul Bowles in 1947, writes Graham Ackroyd, just before he published *The Sheltering Sky* and at a time when he was contributing short stories to a literary magazine in Tangier called *Zero*. He sent me this poem, written when he was 19 or so, with a note to say that he had once shown it to Gertrude Stein. "You're no poet, Mr Bowles," she had said, "Stick to composing", which rather put him off.

Paul Bowles's poem is published in *Nineties Poetry Number Five*, edited by Graham Ackroyd and published by the Lansdowne Press, 33 Lansdowne Place, Hove BN3 1HF at £4.95.

The King's new clothes to be sold after 320 years

MARIANNE MACDONALD
Arts Reporter

The honeysuckle-embroidered wedding suit of James II, the younger son of the executed Charles I, is to be sold at auction next month. The brown wool jacket and breeches will go under the hammer at Sotheby's on 2 November for an estimated £200,000 to £300,000.

The suit was made for James II when, as Duke of York, he married his second wife, the 14-year-old Mary of Modena, in the hope of producing a male heir to the throne. Mary was a fervent Catholic, and the wedding was opposed by the court of the ageing Charles II.

The pair must have made an odd couple - James had a slight, girlish figure, while Mary was described as "tall, and admirably shaped". Nevertheless, the pair were wed in 1673 at a ceremony boycotted by almost all the court except the loyal Sir Edward Carteret, to whom James gave the suit in gratitude. It passed to Sir Edward's widow and then to her sister Anne Durell, later wife of Matthew de Sausmarez of Guernsey. It has been kept at the Sausmarez Manor on Guernsey ever since.

Mary did give birth to a son, James Stuart, who spent most of his life in exile, although Anne and Mary, James's daughters by his first marriage, both became Queen.



Holding on to the past: Anne Lury of Sotheby's with James II's elaborate wedding costume, to be sold in November. Photograph: Glynn Griffiths

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At last, Sarajevo basks in luxury of electric light

EMMA DALY
Sarajevo

The guns along Bosnia's front lines were due to fall silent at one minute past midnight last night, after natural gas and electricity began flowing to Sarajevo, the precondition for a 60-day ceasefire.

The government declared itself satisfied with the restoration of utilities to the capital yesterday, paving the way for a meeting last night to formalise the truce. But the darkest facet of the war - the ethnic cleansing of Serb-held areas - accelerated before the truce, after which the parties are supposed to treat prisoners and civilians "humanely".

"As far as we are concerned, utilities are restored," said Jim Landale, a UN spokesman in Sarajevo. A Bosnian minister, Hasan Muratovic, said the government would meet the rebel Serbs at Sarajevo airport last night, after which "we will

proclaim the full implementation of the agreement and our army will receive an order for a total ceasefire".

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees said 8,000 to 9,000 Muslims were facing expulsion across the front line to central Bosnia. Some 650 refugees, with their tales of horror, were expelled from Sarajevo's Old Town

sank into darkness last night, but the city centre and parts of the new town were enjoying the delights of (heavily restricted) power supplies, and even, in some privileged areas, water. As was the case before the Serbs cut off electricity in May, residents are allowed to use only a few watts - enough to power a television set, a couple of lights and a stove, but no heating - hence the vital importance of gas supplies as winter approaches.

"The city is in the process of being completely gassed up," said Gordon Hay of the British Overseas Development Ad-

ministration. "It is actually flowing into houses at the moment in the centre of the city and the new part of town ... it is hoped that the whole city will be on by tonight."

The ODA engineers were promising a constant supply rather than the 24 hours on, 24 hours off Sarajevoans were accustomed to. And the gas now smells, which should cut the number of explosions. In the past, as pressure fluctuated and pilot lights failed, odourless gas built up until some unfortunate householder lit a match.

"We've lived in the dark for so long," Bosnija Maras said, her eyes filling with tears, as the lights went on. "I don't know what to do first ... I will cook something, then I will clean the flat." City streets filled with the hum of vacuum cleaners and the sound of music yesterday - though most people, like Mrs Maras, did the chores first, fearing the supply would cut out after three or four hours.



Souper: A Red Cross worker prepares to serve at one of the reopened soup kitchens in Sarajevo. Photograph: AP



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Killer of Britons shoots himself

Tangier (Reuters) — A policeman who killed two British tourists in the north Moroccan city of Tangier last week committed suicide yesterday as police closed in on his hideout.

Martin and Margaret Gover, a couple in their 60s from Ruislip, west London, were killed instantly by the gunman, who shouted "Allahu Akbar" (God is Greatest) during a rampage last Friday. Patricia Sherrill, a British woman in her 50s who was shot in the back, flew home in a hospital plane on Sunday.

Police went to a house near Ksar Seghir, four miles north of Tangier, after hearing that the fugitive policeman was hiding there. The official Moroccan news agency, MAP, said: "As he noted their presence, he shot himself with a bullet in the head, which killed him instantly."

The killer has been identified

IN BRIEF

Nigeria cuts coup leader's sentence

Abuja — The life sentence imposed on the former military ruler of Nigeria, retired General Olusegun Obasanjo, on charges of plotting a coup has been reduced to 15 years, the information minister Walter Oforonagoro announced at a news conference in the federal capital, Abuja. Sentences on 41 others allegedly involved in the coup plot, including Gen Obasanjo's former number two Shehu Musa Yar Adua, has also been reduced. Reuter

Court rules it can hold genocide trials

Addis Ababa — An Ethiopian court ruled it has the authority to try members of the former Marxist regime on genocide and murder charges. The Central High Court said the transitional government had the legal authority to set up the court to try members of the regime it defeated and replaced. Lawyers for the 70 defendants had argued the court lacked jurisdiction and that the defendants should be tried by an international tribunal. Twenty-four of the 70 defendants are being tried in *absentia*, including former President Mengistu Haile Mariam, who is in exile in Zimbabwe. All face the death penalty if convicted on genocide or murder charges stemming from the deaths of 1,823 people. AP

Kim Jong-Il still to take up key posts

Tokyo — North Korea's unanointed leader Kim Jong-Il made a rare public appearance at a military parade yesterday to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Communist state's ruling party. Official media and the country's defence minister hailed Kim Jong-Il as the leader of the country's Communist Party, the state and the army, but there was no formal announcement that he had assumed any of the key leadership posts. Reuter

Three Mohajir rebels die in shootout

Karachi — Pakistani police said that three detained militants of the Mohajir National Movement (MQM) were killed in a shootout. Fahim Farooqi, alias Fahim Commando, a well-known militant leader, and two other MQM detainees died in a hail of gunfire after police had taken them to a house they had identified as an MQM hideout during interrogation. Reuter

Hero general takes to the hills

Manila — A former much decorated Philippine army general charged with corruption has announced his defection to Communist rebels and urged other soldiers to join him in the mountains and overthrow the government. Raymundo Jarque, a former regional commander who won 30 medals for his exploits against rebels, said in a published statement he was switching loyalties because he could not expect justice from a system rotten to its core. "The only way to justice is revolution ... to the mountains and revolution!" he said. Reuter

UK ready to encourage Sri Lanka talks

London — Britain is ready to facilitate talks between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil Tiger rebels, who are on the brink of a new round of fighting in their 12-year civil war, writes Michael Sheridan. The Foreign Office minister Jeremy Hanley said on a visit to Colombo that the British government would help arrange a meeting if both sides wanted to negotiate. In London, the Foreign Office said Britain did not want to mediate between the parties but was ready "to encourage them to come together," perhaps at a location in the UK.

Pro-Algeria Chirac defies Islamic militants

Paris — Defiant in the face of threats from Islamic militants trying to overthrow the Algerian government, President Jacques Chirac confirmed he will meet with Algeria's president later this month. And in a new display of resolve to keep Muslim radicals from paralysing relations between France and its former colony, the French government announced it would resume ferry services between Marseilles and Algiers. AP

Observers at risk in Chechen fighting

London — International observers may be forced to pull out of the breakaway Russian republic of Chechnya after getting caught up in fighting between Russian troops and rebels, writes Michael Sheridan. A representative of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe is to go to Chechnya to assess the security of the OSCE delegation. Its presence in the war zone was an important concession from Russia to ward off action by Western countries in response to its military campaign.

FBI puzzles over 'Gestapo' train wreckers

RUPERT CORNWELL
Washington

Beyond doubt, it was sabotage. But one question yesterday preoccupied the US authorities, from the FBI up to President Bill Clinton: just who are the "Sons of Gestapo", apparently responsible for Monday's fatal train derailment in the Arizona desert.

Speaking to business leaders at the White House, Mr Clinton declared his "profound outrage" at an "act of cowardice" which left one crew member of Amtrak's transcontinental Sunset Limited train dead and 80 people injured. But, his aides insisted, the President had not decided the attack was an act of terrorism. "That is a conclusion for law enforcement agencies to reach," said the White House spokesman, Mike McCurry.

As the FBI took over, two theories predominated. The most popular was that, as suggested by the references to Waco and Ruby Ridge in the two notes left near the wreck by the "Sons of Gestapo", the derailment followed the pattern of

April's bombing of the Federal building in Oklahoma City—an act of revenge for the two attacks by government agents on isolationist movements.

The second theory owed less to the note than to the nature of the sabotage, which showed at least a rudimentary knowledge of railways. Hence, this view goes, the culprit could have been a disgruntled former employee of Amtrak, the government-subsidised company operating the Sunset Limited and other long-distance passenger services.

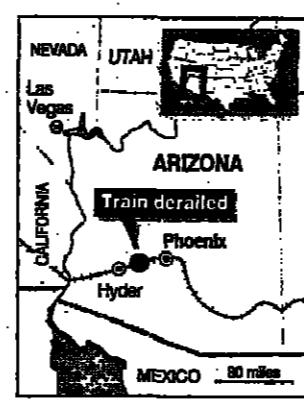
Yesterday Klanwatch, an organisation that tracks hate groups, said it had no record of the "Sons of Gestapo". But, Klanwatch's director, Joe Roy, noted: "It's not unusual for a cell of a larger group to take an alias when it branches out. Or it could have been a solo individual with a grudge, trying to blame it on the militias."

The FBI is pursuing both possibilities, delving anew into the shady world of the citizens' militias—the bulk of them harmless, but a few composed of hard-core extremists bent on

the destruction of the federal state.

On one point, however, the US knew enough about railways and specialists are agreed: Arizona, with its anarchic Wild West past, its proven connections with the militias and frequent appearances in the tale of Timothy McVeigh, who is the chief suspect in the Oklahoma City blast, is a natural breeding ground for such incidents.

Inevitably, new questions are being raised about Amtrak's safety—just as the railway is fighting to stave off further cuts in its funding by the Republican Congress.



Amtrak has suffered a number of accidents in the last few years, most lethally in 1993 when the Sunset Limited, this time heading east, plunged off a bridge into an Alabama lake, drowning 47 people.

Amtrak says that without resources for investment, its network will become more obsolete and less competitive. But Amtrak's chairman, Thomas Downs, insisted yesterday that the system was "100 per cent safe", and denied that the perpetrator was an embittered ex-employee.

"About 300,000 people" in the US knew enough about railways to have removed spikes fastening the rails to the sleepers, unbolted a plate between two sections of rail and then rewired the signal, which would have warned of a gap in the track.

America's very size means that rail tracks can never be fully protected. The Sunset Limited's route covers 3,066 miles, the western third of them mostly empty desert. And one person could have sabotaged the track in 10 minutes, a railroad official said.



Rail rescue: Paramedics from the Arizona National Guard carry off an injured passenger from the Amtrak wreck

CLEVELAND DAYS

Joke city of the rust belt reborn in steel and glass

What is North America's "in" city these days? Vancouver or Seattle on the West Coast, you might imagine, or a booming metropolis of the South such as Atlanta or Albuquerque. Not a bit of it. If there is one place on the planet that is on a roll, it is this erstwhile rust-belt basket case on the gloomy shores of Lake Erie.

Not so long ago, Cleveland, alongside its hapless baseball team, the Indians, was a joke, a "Mistake by the Lake" held up with Detroit as a case study in terminal urban dysfunction. So polluted was the Cuyahoga river, which bisects the city, that in June 1969 it actually caught fire. Cleveland's leaders were a parody of incompetence and provincialism. One former mayor, Ralph Perk, at a ceremony designed to show his solidarity with the working man, managed to set his own hair alight with a blowtorch. Mrs Perk earned her niche in old Cleveland's Hall of Infamy by turning down an invitation to dinner at the White House because it was her night at the bowling club. Finally, Mayor Dennis Kucinich brought about the first financial default of a major US city in modern times. All fitter for the funnymen: "What's the difference between Cleveland and the *Titanic*?" Cleveland has a better orchestra.

You don't hear that sort of thing any more. Cleveland is a city reborn. The centre is a steel, marble, and darkened glass showcase of modern US architecture. The Indians have left the sporting morgue of Municipal Stadium for a glittering \$200m (£130m) arena called Jacobs Field, and are four wins from their first World Series since 1954. Finally, there is the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame, a dazzling white tower and superstructure fused with a glass pyramid, leaning out over the lake. For its rumbustious subject, the airy building may be too reverential, too antiseptic. But it's class, and class is the name of the game in Cleveland.

"By the end of the 1970s we were a city in freefall," Tom Bier, an urban policy specialist at Cleveland State University, told me. "No one could have predicted this; it's far beyond anything I thought possible."

"This" is a tale of enlightened self-interest, linking local non-profit foundations, big business and a new generation of municipal leaders. At some point around 1980, Cleveland's great and good decided they

would not join the national stampede to suburbia. The start was the conversion of the old Baltimore and Ohio rail terminal into a prototype big city office, shopping and restaurant complex. The apotheosis was the debut of the Rock Hall of Fame last month. For Rabbi Ben Kania, spiritual leader of the Temple Tifereth Israel here, more than human agency was involved. "One couldn't help but wonder if God had a hand in this whole epiphany," he wrote in Cleveland's *Plain Dealer*.

Cleveland is not perfect.

You can argue that renewal is for the benefit of the suburbs—that, as Mildred Madison, former city council and school board member, put it, "They're doing out tax breaks for the downtown, while the public school system is rotting."

It is true, too, that a "sin tax" on cigarettes and alcohol to pay for the new baseball stadium, rejected by poorer inner city residents, passed thanks to voters in the suburbs. The same may happen over the renovation of Municipal Stadium, where the footballing Browns still play. "Cough up, or we're outta here," might be summed up as the attitude of the Browns' owners. Middle-class suburban America hates nothing so much as losing a major league sports franchise.

But, you sense, good things are slowly starting to spread to where they are really needed. Drive three miles east of downtown into the Hough neighbourhood, scene of Cleveland's ghetto riots of the Sixties, and a remarkable sight awaits. Houses—decent, freestanding and new—are being built in an American inner city. Not many yet, to be sure, and only with the help of tax breaks and federal incentives. But people are moving in, not out. Amazingly, house sales and house prices are now rising faster in Cleveland than in the suburbs.

Will it work? Can Cleveland, in this racially poisoned post-Olympic era, pull off what no American city has thus far managed?

"What we really want," Mr Bier told me, "is a mix of incomes and a mix of races. We're not there yet, but we're heading in that direction." Forged the Indians and their gorgeous ballpark, forged the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame and the other downtown splendours by the lake. To dream a little dream in Cleveland, go to Hough.

RUPERT CORNWELL



On a roll: Designed by I M Pei, Cleveland's Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame adds some class to North Coast Harbour

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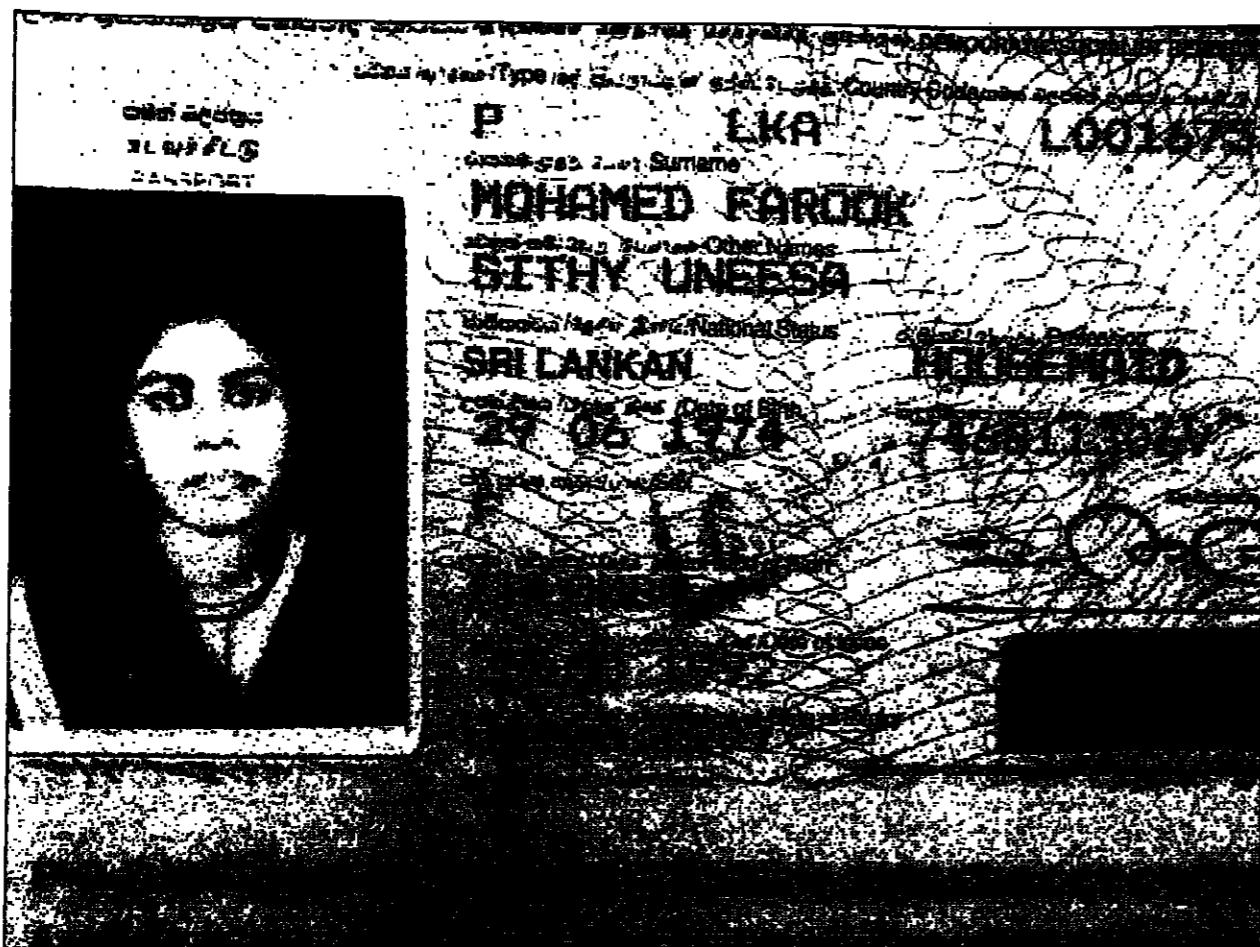
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international



Executed: Passport photograph of the overworked maid. The victim's father insisted she die. Photograph: Reuter

No mercy for young maid who begged to go home

Said Saleh Mansour turned up every day to attend the trial in the United Arab Emirates of the 19-year-old accused of killing his four-year-old daughter.

Again and again, he urged the court to expedite her execution. Asked to pardon the Sri Lankan maid, the father – a senior officer in the Ras al-Khaimar police department – replied uncompromisingly. "Sir," he wrote, "how can I pardon a person who has brutally killed my innocent daughter who was only four years of age?" The letter sealed the fate of Sithy Farook. In April, she was led from her prison cell to stand in a white abaya gown, crying uncontrollably, before a seven-man firing squad.

Her father, Mohamed Nilan, a labourer attached to the city council in Colombo, capital of Sri Lanka, heard that the second of his five daughters had been executed after an Islamic trial only when neighbours

received a telephone call from one of her friends.

"Our daughter was so unhappy with her employers that she wrote home many times saying she wanted to return to Sri Lanka," he told one of the local Colombo newspapers 12 days after his daughter's execution. "But we asked her to stay and complete her contract – now look at the fate that befell her."

Appeals by the Sri Lankan government, its embassy in Abu Dhabi – the capital of the United Arab Emirates – and even from the president of the Ras al-Khaimar court, refused to soften Said Mansour's anger.

Sithy Farook had stabbed his daughter to death on 17 October, 1994, and she must pay the price. In his eyes, and in those of the court, there were no extenuating circumstances: no one mentioned Sithy's pleading letters to her father, even if they knew about them. No one suggested – as Sithy told friends in the prison – that she had confessed to the crime only because Said Mansour had promised she would be sent home to Sri Lanka if she did.

Sithy Farook's story is tragically mundane, a pathetic tale of a former Colombo garment worker who was sent out to the emirates as a maid to earn enough money to buy her parents a new home in Sri Lanka, only to find herself overwhelmed by the work she was given and the six children she was expected to look after. Her employer had invited relatives to live in his home, she wrote, ordering Sithy to look after all of them – a total of 17 children, some of them babies, and one of them a handicapped girl.

After her execution, Sri Lanka's newspapers – though very definitely not the emirates' press – asked what had driven Sithy Farook to kill the four-year-old girl. In court, she readily admitted to the murder, as she did to Sri Lankan embassy officials. A report by the Sri Lankan foreign ministry later recorded that Sithy "without any hesitation or fear... admitted she committed the offence... she remembers the child biting her arm and she, having lost her temper, stabbing her with a pen-knife-like nail-cutter which was in her hands at that moment."

According to the Ras al-Khaimar court, however, Sithy stabbed the child again with a "sharp steel key" when failing to resuscitate her when she had a fit. The records state that the maid then wrapped the child's body in a piece of cloth, placed it in a box and buried it beneath a neighbouring house.

In the weeks immediately

before the killing, Sithy had addressed several more letters to her parents, pleading to be allowed to go home, adding that her employer was not passing all her letters and was not passing on letters from her family. Her father gave his permission for her to come home, but, so he said later, Sithy decided to carry on working for another two years.

When he heard of his daughter's death sentence, he met Sri Lanka's government leaders and personally appealed for his daughter's life to the President of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan. The Sri Lankan chargé d'affaires in Abu Dhabi discussed Sithy's case with the emirates' ministry of foreign affairs. Repeated offers were made to the dead child's family.

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In the weeks immediately

Mexico plays down quake as toll reaches 66

PHIL DAVISON
Latin America Correspondent

President Ernesto Zedillo yesterday declared one of Mexico's prime tourist playgrounds a disaster area after at least 66 people, and possibly many more, were killed in Mexico's worst earthquake since 1985. But he went ahead with his first state visit to Washington, where he was greeted at the White House by President Bill Clinton yesterday morning.

The government sought to play down the extent of Monday's quake in resorts along the Pacific coast, but it could be a crippling blow to tourism at a time when the struggling economy badly needs the income.

The government sent troops to help with rescue work after Monday's tremor, measured at 7.6 on the Richter scale.

Worst hit was the upmarket resort of Manzanillo, 325 miles west of Mexico City. The seven-storey Costa Real hotel collapsed completely, trapping 30 guests and 27 employees as guests took breakfast just after 9.30am.

Reuters reported that a 21-year-old honeymooner, Carlos Jimenez, sat with his head in his hands waiting for rescuers to bring out his bride. He had seen her buried under a huge pillar, apparently dead.

Seven police officers were killed when a police station collapsed near Manzanillo. Hotels were also damaged in another resort, Puerto Vallarta, but none collapsed.

Mr Zedillo, under fire for his handling of the economic crisis, the unsolved murders of two top politicians and a cardinal, and alleged government links with drug traffickers, was immediately criticised for going ahead with his Washington trip.

Possibly thinking of future tourist trade, he described the disaster as "not of unmanageable magnitude". That reminded Mexicans of the words of President Miguel de la Madrid in September 1985, after at least 6,000 people, and possibly up to 10,000, were killed in an earthquake registering 8.1 on the Richter scale. He declared that Mexico did not need outside help. He later had to retract that statement.

After being greeted by Mr Clinton on the South Lawn, Mr Zedillo said they would discuss illegal immigration, Mexico's economy and drug trafficking. More than 70 per cent of the cocaine consumed in the US comes through Mexico, mostly from Colombia. Asian gangs use Mexico as a transit point for heroin and it is also a major source of marijuana.

A Colombian news report at the weekend said Mr Zedillo's election campaign last year had been partly financed by Colombia's Cali cocaine cartel. Adding that Mr Zedillo was probably unaware of such funding, the report said the information had come from a cartel informant in detention in the US. Mr Zedillo's government and the US Drug Enforcement Administration denied the report.

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The new Mercedes E-class



A rescue worker searches for earthquake victims at Hotel Costa Real in Manzanillo. Photograph: AP

مدى من الأفضل

ig maid
home

On fire: Fire-fighters damp down the remains of Otaki's 146-year-old Rangiatea church. Arson is suspected

Photograph: Reuter

international

Burning down of Maori church ignites race fears

PETER WALKER

It is a signal of the changed temper in New Zealand that the sight of flames leaping from an old wooden church in the middle of the night now arouses suspicion of racially-inspired arson.

The destruction of the Rangiatea Anglican church last weekend in the town of Otaki 40 miles north of Wellington would, in any case, have come as a blow to the country.

Rangiatea was built by one of the greatest figures in New Zealand history, the chief Te Rauparaha, who conquered much of the country at roughly the same time Europeans were settling. Although he probably never converted to Christianity, his church became a symbol of rare cross-pollination between the races, European and Maori.

Dozens of trees were hauled down to the coast by Maori, while European or *pakeha* sailors and whalers raised the roof beams.

The work was overseen by a

young English missionary, Octavius Hadfield, also remembered for taking a group of Maori chiefs back to Oxford in the 1830s and there compiling the first Maori lexicon.

From the outside, the church was an example of the best early colonial architecture; inside, the atmosphere was overwhelmingly Maori, with great wooden pillars and *takete* panels of decorative woven flax covering the walls.

The possibility that Rangiatea – the name means the “Abode of the Absolute” and derives from a sacred island west of Tahiti – was deliberately burned down adds an ominous dimension to the racial divisions that have emerged in New Zealand since the 1980s.

In the past two years there have been a series of tit-for-tat attacks, always at night, on various symbols of the rival races – a colonial statue here, a Maori community meeting house there.

Last month a group of Maoris in Northland burned

down a school building in a dispute over land occupation. Before last weekend’s fire, graffiti had been sprayed on the statue of Te Rauparaha and elsewhere in the churchyard.

Some in the local Maori community had no doubt yesterday about the cause and culprit behind the fire. “White power,” they said.

There is in fact no such group or body – but the phrase represents something real in New Zealand: an increasing anger among many whites at the new Maori assertiveness and demands for reparation for stolen or confiscated land.

Te Rauparaha – who is also famous for composing the words of the *haka* that the All Blacks perform before rugby test matches – spent most of his life at war, before turning to the arts of peace in his last years.

For nearly a century and a half his handiwork was a symbol of concord. That it has now gone – either by accident or design – does not bode well for New Zealand.

West's fears deepen over spread of missiles

CHRISTOPHER BELLAMY
Defence Correspondent

The spread of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and ballistic missiles to carry them is “one of the world’s greatest concerns”, the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) said in its latest edition of its annual survey of world military power, published yesterday.

However, the institute’s director, John Chipman, warned those who portrayed Islam as a new and coherent threat to fill the vacuum left by the collapse of Communism. “Not all these challenges can be met by the astute deployment of military force. I don’t think it’s right to talk about Islam as an organised threat against the West,” Dr Chipman said.

He also identified China and North Korea as the only countries in East Asia spending more on defence than was justified by their legitimate needs. The IISS describes China’s behaviour as “evasive” and accuses it of “classification” in accounting.

At present, no missiles owned by states other than the official nuclear club – the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France – can reach Europe or North America, but the IISS confirmed predictions that the situation could change in the next few years. North Korea is developing a missile that can reach US territory, and missiles launched from North Africa and the Middle East are expected to be able to hit Britain in less than a decade.

The latest issue of *The Military Balance* covers missile proliferation, Chinese military spending and peace-keeping.

“It is somewhat bizarre that the end of the Cold War has heightened perceptions of the missile threat,” the survey says. Fifteen countries apart from the European and former Soviet states have surface-to-surface missiles, casting doubt on the effectiveness of the Missile Control Regime.

China quadruples defence budget

China has been lying to the UN about its defence spending, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, writes Christopher Bellamy.

The Chinese do not report their defence spending to the United Nations in the standardised format. The United States Defense Secretary, William Perry, asked Peking last year to “improve the transparency of their military accounting”. The IISS estimated Chinese military spending in 1985 was \$20bn (£17.5bn) – four times the official figure. Calculating the defence spending of Communist regimes has always been difficult. This year’s issue of the IISS’s *Military Balance* features detailed analyses of that of Russia and China. The latter is complicated by the fact that the People’s Liberation Army not only maintains armed forces of 1 million, making exact accounting impossible, but also

(MTCR), signed by 25 countries. Key missile suppliers – including China – appear not to have complied fully with the MTCR guidelines.

The only alternative is, of course, active defence measures,” *The Military Balance* says. These would range from anti-missiles such as the Patriot used in the 1991 Gulf war to more sophisticated measures as envisaged in the Eighties Star Wars initiative. The US is developing ballistic missile defences – first, to protect its own forces and regional allies and, second, to counter future attacks on the US itself.

According to the journal *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, so many missile defence studies are under way that Pentagon officials are afraid it will not be possible to evaluate them all.

For the moment, conventional aircraft are more likely to cause serious damage than missiles, the IISS says, because they can carry more explosive or chemical or biological agents, and can hit more accurately. But the ballistic missile, “mainly on account of its range, speed and cost relative to that of a misused aircraft, is a favoured delivery means for proliferating states”.

Missile proliferation threatens three areas: the Middle East, where even relatively short range missiles can strike other states’ capitals, the Indian subcontinent, and North Korea’s neighbours.

The longest-range and most formidable missile in the Middle East is the Chinese-made CSS-2, deployed by Saudi Arabia. With a range of nearly 1,700 miles and a two-and-a-half-ton warhead, it outranges Israel’s Jericho-2, which can fly 940 miles and carries five times as much high explosive, chemical or biological agent.

North Korea’s Scud-C missile, with a range of more than 300 miles, can hit anywhere in South Korea, and the Taepo-Dong missile, range 1,500 miles, now under development, could hit the US territory of Guam.

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Michael Portillo's shabby patriotism

Last winter it looked as though this week's Tory conference would be riven from top to toe with bloody dissension over Europe. The expelled Eurosceptics were screaming for the Cabinet to rule out ever joining a single currency and pro-Europeans were warning of the dangers of exclusion from the mainstream European debate.

Yesterday, across Blackpool, the shrill hysteria of the Eurosceptics had gone. Their passion has ebbed - not because they are reconciled to elements of the European project, but because they no longer regard it as an immediate threat. As Norman Lamont revealed in his contribution to the fringe, the nationalists think they are winning the argument. "We are all Eurosceptics now," he boasted.

And in many ways he is right. What has changed is not the Conservative Party, but the rest of Europe. In the summer the German Finance Minister, Theo Waigel, raised doubts about the validity of several countries to meet the Maastricht criteria. Meanwhile the French President, Jacques Chirac, faces serious obstacles to his policy of shadowing the mark. In these circumstances any move towards greater monetary integration in the near future looks unlikely. The Eurosceptics thus feel less threatened. The idealistic Euro-enthusiasts are slightly chastened, and - for the moment - the moderate pro-European politicians feel that they can afford to indulge the right wing.

Public attention is shifting to the internal argument over economic priorities; to tax cuts versus public spending. The sound and fury centres on the question of who - if anybody - should pay the price for Tory ambitions to give the middle classes a pre-election bonus. Difficult though this ground is, its lack of any

absolute focus renders it much easier for the Tory high command to deal with - and find some accommodation between the different wings over - than Europe.

The only problem is that some senior Tories are not prepared to sign up to a ceasefire on Europe. Yesterday the Defence Secretary, Michael Portillo, made it clear that a consensus on Europe is not attractive to him. With no economic union to rail against, Mr Portillo acquired a new enemy: European defence co-operation. After spuriously invoking the dead of two world wars, Mr Portillo constructed a new Aunt Sally - a European superstate giving orders (presumably barked in comic German) to British soldiers. "No way," he yelled, to predictable applause.

In his single-minded pursuit of the longest standing ovation of the conference, Mr Portillo was jeopardising the one area where far greater European co-operation is urgently needed. As events in Bosnia have demonstrated, the Americans are increasingly reluctant to intervene in foreign crises, and the lack of any properly co-ordinated European action has been sadly evident. We can and must do better if we are to deal with the complex geopolitics of the next century, when the unilateral efforts of small nations will become increasingly irrelevant or counterproductive.

Mr Portillo is happy to build his alternative political base in the party, exploiting any opportunity he can to use the European issue. That is not a surprise. What is less clear is what the Prime Minister will do about it. If the answer is "nothing", then his willingness to pander to ultra-nationalism may rebound on him. Meanwhile those on the left of the party, already aroused by Alan Howarth's decision to quit, will feel even more uncomfortable in the face of Mr Portillo's crude populism.

Pocahontas and the chain-smoker

The Disney Corporation is displaying the first signs of madness. It seems to believe that there is some connection between its cartoon Native American princess - currently enchanting the nation's children in the blockbuster film *Pocahontas* - and the real 17th-century personality, who is buried in a churchyard in Gravesend, Kent. To that end it has decided to endow the true Pocahontas's burial site to the tune of £9,000 - money that will help to buy floodlights for the church.

In fact the most historically accurate aspect of the Disney character is probably Pocahontas's friendship with a talking raccoon. She never got off with the settler John Smith (who, far from being a blond surfing hunk, looked a bit like Ronnie Corbett with a false beard) and she was considerably younger than the little 18 or 19 depicted in the film. The true princess married a different colonist, John Rolfe, one of the earliest tobacco importers and conceivably the first European to become a chain-smoker.

You can see why the real princess had to be tampered with a little, so as to appeal to the audience of today. A tale of ragged Indians and settlers of unpleasant men, comfortable with paedophilia and smoking themselves silly or something that made filterless Gauloises taste like perfumed Silk Cut, would not sell the books, figurines, dolls and other trimmings, which between them are netting yet another fortune for the Disney people.

ANOTHER VIEW Lord Gowrie

Disney's Pocahontas no more existed than did Snow White, Sleeping Beauty or Pinocchio - yet Disney itself is now attempting to co-opt the historical princess, merging true stories with their cartoon shadows. Now conscientious parents throughout Britain will be forced to explain to their disappointed offspring that it just ain't so.

As for Disney, what next? A sponsored kennels in Sherwood Forest for the descendants of Disney's vulpine Robin Hood? A subsidy for a poisoned apple detector service? A handbook on what to do if your dog gives birth to 101 puppies? Or, better still, a sense of humility in the presence of history. Now that would be magical.

Art for all our sakes

William Waldegrave, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, is reportedly trying to renege on a promise that money from the National Lottery will never replace existing government arts funding. It appears that he wants to replace such grants with endowments to major arts institutions. A leaked letter indicates that the Secretary of State for National Heritage, Virginia Bottomley, is resisting this move.

Mrs Bottomley is right to take issue with the Treasury to ensure that lottery money is not used as a substitute for current government responsibilities. Government should be engaged in the arts (even at arm's length) and be committed to the notion of supporting the country's arts and culture. This commitment should be for their intrinsic value and also for the contribution they make to the country's health and vitality, and indeed its whole economy.

Mrs Bottomley said that the idea of using endowments to fund arts organisations was "not a runner", and I agree totally. Endowments give such poor value: in order to fund the current Arts Council portfolio, well over £2.25bn, at a cautious estimate, would have to be invested - vastly more than the arts are likely to receive from this lottery even by the year 2000.

That estimate covers only those professional arts organisations currently funded by the council. Lottery funds are currently open to all organisations that



Not only are banks merging, bank robbers are too

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Crime and punishment: Islamic law versus Western values

From Mr Bassam Alloni

Sir: The editorial in today's issue, "The Gulf widens over executions" (9 October), and your reporting of the controversy surrounding Filipino maids ("The maid on death row," 9 October) will do little to change the situation in the Gulf to which they refer. Islamic law and the judgments made under Islamic law cannot be compared with entirely culturally different Western values. By Western standards the executions in Saudi Arabia this year may seem shocking, but it must be realised that Saudi is an Islamic country, and as such can not radically change its judicial system.

The workings and practices of courts in Islamic countries are so little understood in the West that there is often total incomprehension at the way decisions are reached and cases conducted, and then a complete over-reaction when the judgments of the courts are carried out. Muslims have a deep respect for their judicial system and a desire to live in an Islamic society, whether this meets with approval in the West or not. It is also worth noting that crime levels in Saudi Arabia are far lower than in the West.

It seems to be forgotten in the hysterical publicity surrounding the isolated cases reported that there are well over 1.5 million Filipino migrant workers in the Gulf. They will contribute much of the \$6bn sent home annually by the 4.2 million Filipino workers worldwide. The impact of the workers in the Gulf is acknowledged by the Filipino Minister of Labour, who visits the region every year to sign further employment treaties. His government must be satisfied with

conditions or it would not encourage so many of its citizens to work in the Gulf.

Of course there are exceptional cases, but they constitute a tiny minority. Such charges, levied against the Gulf, constituting a sweeping and extremely unfair generalisation, will not help the Filipinos, and will not help the Saudis, and will not change Islamic law or the desire of Muslim people to live under their chosen jurisdiction.

Yours faithfully,
BASSAM ALLONI
Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies
London, EC1
9 October

From Mr Richard Sockitt

Sir: Your focus on the appalling violation of human rights under the Saudi judicial system, with its mockery of accepted legal norms, offers another shameful reminder of just how far Western governments can sacrifice moral scruples for economic greed.

Yet apart from the escalating numbers reported by Robert Fisk (9 October), none of this makes surprising reading if we consider successive Amnesty reports and, as you make clear, sources independent of our own government. But here, alas, is where your suggestions for a solution appear well-intentioned but vastly optimistic.

Your leading article, commendable in many respects, ultimately hinges on a principled view of Western motivation which at present is unlikely to be shared by the Foreign Office, less still by the regime in Riyadh. Privately, neither would be under any illusion about exactly why we dispatched 500,000 troops to defend Saudi "freedom", and any threat to abandon them to Saddam -

that the competitive market in the NHS has reduced us to. The Assisted Conception Unit was not set up to make a profit, as implied by Professor Winston, rather it was established because so many of our patients were having to wait for so long for IVC. Until recently this may have been up to four years on the NHS. This left them little choice but to go to private clinics and pay in the region of £2,000 per treatment cycle. This both we and our patients found distressing.

We wished to establish a unit with an empathetic and caring environment. To this end we plan to limit the size of the clinic, to treat only those eligible for NHS care, either funded by their DHA or self-funded at "cost price". We would want to regard those working in the Fertility Clinic at the Hammersmith Hospital, as colleagues and friends with the best interests of patients at heart and not as competitors. We would hope that this feeling is reciprocated.

Yours sincerely,
MICHAEL E. PAWSON
MARK R. JOHNSON
HOSSAM I. ABDALLA
JONATHAN W. RAMSAY
Assisted Conception Unit
Chelsea and Westminster Hospital
London, SW10
10 October

October). I hope he was not trying to model headwear too, as he was beheaded some 17 years before.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN SHEPHERD
Deanscales, Cumbria

to the doorsteps of the employer shorten it, it is usually in exchange for an earlier end to the working day. In this setting, where so many women have jobs and not careers, where the work is not well-paid and often boring, you go out to work mainly for the money, but job satisfaction is often less than in motherhood - sometimes even outside marriage. Your contributors and readers should remember how the other half lives.

Yours faithfully,
F. M. M. STEINER
Deddington, Oxfordshire
9 October

disappeared. Where (as in the case of my son-in-law recently) the employer shortens it, it is usually in exchange for an earlier end to the working day. In this setting, where so many women have jobs and not careers, where the work is not well-paid and often boring, you go out to work mainly for the money, but job satisfaction is often less than in motherhood - sometimes even outside marriage. Your contributors and readers should remember how the other half lives.

Yours faithfully,
F. M. M. STEINER
Deddington, Oxfordshire
9 October

Doorstep ire

From Mr Karel Schuck

Sir: Has Professor R. A. Burchell (letter, 7 October) never heard of the friendly neighbour who makes sure during one's absence that mail or other articles left on the doorstep and mail visible on the mat through a glass door are removed out of sight?

In our close, there is always somebody taking care of a neighbour's mail, etc. and no burglaries so far. One cannot, surely, blame BT for one's own folly.

Yours very sincerely,
KAREL SCHUCK
Redhill, Surrey

8 October

Letters should be addressed to Letters to the Editor, The Independent, One Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL and include a daytime telephone number. (Fax: 0171-293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk) Letters may be edited for length and clarity. We regret that we are unable to acknowledge unpublished letters.

Man, party or democracy?

From Mr Richard Eensor

Sir: In evaluating the recent move of Alan Howarth, MP for Stratford-upon-Avon, from the Conservative Party to the Labour Party, there is a question of loyalty to consider. Has Mr Howarth done the right thing, choosing loyalty to his social conscience over his party?

As Britain is a democracy, where constituency members vote for a person (not a party) to represent them at the Houses of Parliament, surely the first loyalty of an MP is to the people of the constituency rather than a party?

Today, Mr Howarth looked tired and sincere. It is difficult to see his move as an act of loyalty for any party. However, he has shown loyalty to his own values and has not been respected by those who expected his loyalty. The timing, coincidental or not, surely calls to account some Conservatives' attitudes towards the responsibilities of democratic power. In complaining of his disloyalty, some of the party faithful reveal a poor grasp of the nature of democracy, indeed they are hoist by their own petard.

Today, Mr Howarth looked tired and sincere. It is difficult to see his move as an act of loyalty for any party. However, he has shown loyalty to his own values and has not been respected by those who expected his loyalty.

One is the quality of the evidence available to those 13 judges and the access of the accused both to that evidence and to professionals capable of arguing the case it promotes. The second concerns the independence of a nation's judiciary from its executive. Would he comment further?

"The West" is not the homogeneous society it portrays, any more than we should suppose Arabs or Muslims to be. The West is made up of groups as disparate in their individuality as Swedes and Americans, French and New Zealanders. Each will criticise the other. Neither Communism nor nuclear physics, nor even Christianity, has united them. Each contains individuals ready and able to condemn our awesome propensity for war and weaponry. None would claim to be perfect but each would claim integrity and independence for its legal systems.

Yet even in that, each can be

self-critical. Many Americans now question the integrity of a legal system whose outcomes are so evidently partial and in which the state and its judiciary, if not sanctioning the murder of people either known to be innocent or whose guilt is not sufficiently defined, have been too ready to turn the blind eye to those who do. Here in Britain society is shocked by corruption among police forces in this very matter of evidence. The issue remains not the process but the quality of justice, and of mercy.

Yours sincerely,
MERVYN BENFORD

Bambury
10 October

From Mr Nicolas Walter

Sir: The Saudi ambassador's defence is wrong to claim that *sharia* "represents the sacred word of the Koran". This is only one element in *sharia*, alongside the later traditions, the consensus of even later scholars, and the continuing process of reasoning by analogy.

For another thing, it is wrong to omit the possibility of progress. Jewish and Christian laws, which were once as drastic as Muslim laws were reformed by a growing sense of humanity in the area of crime and punishment. This is expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other such texts, which aren't sacred but surely offer a better basis for justice than the scriptures of ancient religions or the traditions of savage tribes.

Yours sincerely,

NICOLAS WALTER

Rationalist Press Association

London, N1

10 October

By the same logic, those Tory MPs who were withheld the party whip should also have stood down to allow an election to be held. I don't recall any Tory proposing this.

If the vote is for the man, not the party, then Mr Howarth stays.

If a vote is for the party, not the man, then the Tories cannot argue against party lists in a PR system.

Which is it, man or party?

Yours sincerely,

STEPHEN GOULD

London, SW5

9 October

From Mr N. Barn

Sir: I note that John Redwood failed to mention Alan Howarth's assertion that "hostile and discriminatory attitudes to foreigners and minorities exist in a wholly unacceptable way in the party".

Yours sincerely,

N. BARN

Wolverhampton

9 October

Flood of letters

From Mr Sebastian Robinson

Sir: John Walsh reports in his diary today (5 October) how he was humiliated by Umberto Eco for not knowing who Robert Flood was.

He needn't worry. Since the Rosicrucian R.F. (1574-1637) wrote under the names Fludd, Fludd, de Fluctibus, Rudolf Otrub, Joachim Frizius and (possibly) Alitophilus, it appears that he didn't know himself who he was.

Yours faithfully,
SEBASTIAN ROBINSON

Glasgow

5 October

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comment

Why single mothers baffle Mr Lilley

Social engineering will not work on lone parents. Moralists calling for cuts may be disappointed

When Peter Lilley stands up today at the Conservative Party conference, he will probably take a ritualistic swipe at single mothers as the source and symbol of all modern ills. Right-wing commentators have been calling for cuts in one-parent benefit and one-parent premium. The plethora of conference motions pouring in from the constituencies deplored single motherhood can hardly be ignored altogether. Yet somehow the missionary zeal isn't quite what it was.

After all, the Government has been through many a bruising episode on this issue since the 1992 conference, when no fewer than seven cabinet ministers stood up in a concerted tirade against this soft target. Now, perhaps, they are older, wiser and sobered by some uncomfortable experiences. It isn't as easy as they thought.

Back to basics blew up in their face, to the detriment of all breeders. Single parents turned out not to be aliens from the lower orders but within everyone's families, including MPs'. Few families now are not touched at some point by divorce and separation, with a single parent lurking somewhere among relatives. That curious gap between policy and the real world around them has narrowed. The one piece of practical policy designed to make life harder for single mothers has been all but dropped, removing their so-called priority on housing lists.

Then there has been the fiasco of the Child Support Agency, still collecting less money than the old system it replaced. Again, it all seemed so easy on paper, chasing the absent fathers to make them pay, instead of the taxpayer who currently forks out some £9bn for

single parents and their children. But mass revolt followed as fathers refused to pay. The inefficiency of an agency impossibly overstretched is still letting them get away with it. The Government's retreat in panic, allowing hundreds of thousands of non-paying fathers to escape, disheartened some of the CSA's strongest advocates. The principle was undeniably right. But ministers never anticipated the passions aroused as the agency became bogged in the mire of bitter divorces.

Moral engineering as well as recovery of money was part of the rationale behind the CSA. Threatening men with heavy maintenance payments was meant to make them hesitate to leave their families in the first place. There is no sign yet that it has had any such effect.

Even so, thinkers of right and left have not altogether abandoned their curious belief that there are levers a government can pull that will radically change people's social and sexual behaviour. Surely there could be tax incentives for people to marry in the first place? The married man's tax allowance should be increased not abolished, some have been saying loudly. But this goes against current fiscal orthodoxy, and the Chancellor has given no sign that he intends to do anything of the sort.

But the main anxiety is about the million single parents on social security. Surely here there must be something a government can do to make people behave differently? The far right, embodied by the Social Affairs Unit, believes that the benefit system is the cause of all evil. It says there would be no single parents if there

POLLY TOYNBEE
Left and right seek to
whip people back
into marriage

was no welfare state to sustain them. Women would not dare to conceive outside wedlock, men would feel a moral obligation to marry and support any woman they made pregnant, otherwise they would starve. When John Redwood advocates adoption, this is a kind of unspoken code for the idea that removing benefits would oblige women to hand over any babies that they could not pay for to couples who could. But he dares say no more than that they should be "encouraged".

A parade of single parents from hell has hit the press in recent weeks; that handful of women with multiple children by different fathers who see no reason why the taxpayer should not pay. (In fact, on average, single mothers have only 1.7 children and only stay single mothers for an average of four years.) These stories have accompanied a clamour for something to be done, and a beady eye falls upon those benefits targeted specifically on single parents.

Critics are quite right when they point out that the tax and benefit system seems perversely to promote separation and to encourage fraud. It pays an unemployed couple to part or pretend to part and draw benefit separately. As a result there may be many fewer single parents than figures show. The CSA has uncovered massive fraud, with supposedly "absent" fathers still living at home, while drawing benefit elsewhere.

A lone mother and child on £72.80 benefit gets an extra £5.20 lone parent premium. It is an odd benefit as it assumes there is an extra cost for being alone when, in reality, women on benefit find having an unemployed man around more expensive. This premium could be under threat if the Government is looking for something nasty to do. It may be an oddly constructed benefit, and perhaps should be reassigned as extra for all children on income support, regardless of how many parents they have. But to cut it back would be savage.

Lone-parent benefit has also come under attack in recent weeks, for the same reason that it sounds suspiciously like a reward for bad behaviour. This is paid to all lone mothers not on social security. Its oddity, like child benefit, is that it doesn't go to the poor on income support, while it does go to the richest single mothers, whatever they earn. Its great asset, like child benefit, is that it acts as a ladder of benefit into work. To cut it (except perhaps for the rich) would be self-defeating.

The Conservative social policy thinker David Willets has advocated abolishing any special status for single

parents. He would give all mothers income support and child benefit until their children reached the age of five, after which any unsupported mothers would be registered unemployed, and treated the same as anyone else, chivvied into work. He does not think this will happen, however, because of the cost of child care, and the fact that unemployment figures would rise by a million overnight.

On left as well as right, they search for ways to whip people back into marriage. Frank Field, Labour's social security guru, wants to reform the whole system to help single mothers and others to escape the traps and obstacles that stop them working. But he, too, has some of the same moral engineering instincts as the right. He wants to convert the lone-parent premium into an extra benefit for couples. Would they have to be married? No, he says. Would they have to be the natural father? No. Any man dragged in through the front door would qualify then? Yes. Is any man really so much better than none? It is the doubtful thesis that strongly underpins most thinking on this subject.

However, Peter Lilley has been curiously quiet about single mothers. He may trumpet about the high levels of fraud to be weeded out, but it is likely to be a cover concealing his inability to satisfy Tory bloodlust. He may know that only child care and better back-to-work incentives are real engines for social change. Those who have been calling for cuts may be disappointed. How much can you cut from £78 a week for a mother and child before people starve?

Mozart: the sex, the house party

All that is needed to save the BBC is one good idea. It might be *Around the World in Eighty Days*. It might be *Great Railway Journeys*. It might be *Pride and Prejudice*. But that is all it takes. One great idea. At the moment we think that idea might be *Mozart's Pupils*.

The speaker is Eric Bostfor, Commissioner-General of the BBC. But what does a Commissioner-General do? And what is *Mozart's Pupils* all about?

"First things first," says Eric, with the smile of a man who has just seen a harmless long hop coming down the pitch towards him. "Yes, I am the Commissioner-General. But you're right, you can't tell from my title what exactly I do. You never can in the BBC. I have known people spend a lifetime in the BBC with their colleagues, having no idea what their job was. Sometimes they had no idea themselves. Well, I am in charge of vetting all incoming proposals and suggestions from independents and outsiders, with a view to weeding out the good ones."

And commissioning them? "Oh no," smiles Eric. "It would be terribly expensive to do that. When we find a good idea for a programme sent in from outside, we reject it. Then we make the programme."

"I'm sorry, I don't quite understand."

"What happens is that if we get a cracking good idea, like, say, a series on Mozart's pupils, we write back to the person and say that we are terribly sorry but we are already working on a series along very similar lines."

And are you? "Oh, no, we don't tell them that. It would be terribly expensive to tell them that. However, we do have a list of titles of almost every conceivable unmade programme in the world, so if pushed to it, we could probably point to an idea on the list not unlike the one proposed to us, the one which we reject and then use."

Hmm. Well, how did the idea for *Mozart's Pupils* arrive?

What is the idea, come to that?

"Well," smiles Eric Bostfor. "I got this idea myself, actually. In fact, I got it from a letter sent to us by an independent company somewhere down West."

Bath, Bristol, Exeter, somewhere like that?

"No, I think it was down Ealing way," says Eric, with the air of a man for whom London is the whole country. "The letter said that the last remaining undiscovered area in the field of the great composers was their pupils. Chopin was always falling in love with his. Mendelssohn had some tender friendships. Beethoven had some very serious young men. But Mozart was the one whose pupils were worth examining, if

only because he was young and attractive and mischievous, and his pupils were female and pretty and..."

He trails off into silence, smiling to himself. Then he seems to come out of a dream.

"Anyway, I wrote back saying that sadly we were already working on the idea, and thought no more about it. Then one day I was playing through some Mozart piano sonatas, and noticed a dedication to a Fraulein Sophie somebody, and I thought: *Who was this girl? Why do we know nothing about her?* This was a girl whose fingers Mozart had touched, whose very body posture he had rearranged, yet we knew nothing about her!"

Hold on a moment. Wasn't this exactly the same idea as the one the man from Ealing had suggested?

"So gradually the idea of a great epic began to emerge," says Eric Bostfor, ignoring me. "Big country house in the landscape. Great reunion of



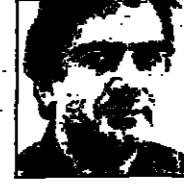
MILES KINGTON

A new book about homosexuality holds an important lesson about the limits of soundbite debate

Kiss goodbye to gay politics

You don't have to be in Blackpool to know that politics is a small matter, a trivial, self-important sideshow. You don't even have to be on some American campus or in a Los Angeles courtroom to know how deluded and banal the political debate can become. But you may have to read Andrew Sullivan's *Virtually Normal: an argument about homosexuality* to know that by seeing through politics, by neutralising its stale categories, you might manage to say something human. "Politics," writes Sullivan, "cannot do the work of life. Even culture cannot do the work of life. Only life can do the work of life."

As "an argument about homosex-



BRYAN APPLEYARD



In your face: gayness is like having red hair, it should not be a political statement. Photograph: Tom Pilston

uality" *Virtually Normal* is sane; as an argument about politics it is radical. Sullivan is a political thinker and yet every sentence is imbued with a sense of the limitations of politics. Indeed, the book might be read as a confession of radical political ignorance, of our complete inability to create rational programmes from the plurality of experience.

Wittgenstein is quoted at the beginning – "One can only describe here and say: this is what human life is like" – and Montaigne at the end – "There is no quality so universal here as difference". And, in between these colossi, there is Sullivan agreeing that, even in politics, there is a mystery, an ultimate irrationality which it may be destructive to try and decipher.

But, first, the book is about the politics of homosexuality. Sullivan, a homosexual, is clearly appalled by the way his condition has been politicised, especially in the US. Most of the book is taken up with an elegant and lucid destruction of the main attitudes involved. He distinguishes four categories: prohibitionist, liberalist, conservative and liberal. Few people, he admits, fall cleanly into any one category. Disturbingly, I recognised fragments of myself in each of the first three, though not happily, in the fourth.

He dismisses prohibitionism on the basis of its dubious, incoherent theology, and liberalism on the basis of

its arid and anarchic failure to engage with the real world. Both are condemned for their underlying insistence that homosexuality is not a distinct condition. The prohibitionists on the hard right insist that it is a personal choice and, therefore, it can be said to be morally wrong. The liberalists on the left, guided by Michel Foucault, argue that all sexual identities are social and verbal constructs into which we are forced by existing power structures, in order to restrict freedom of expression. Such an ideology can justify brutal, revolutionary action – for example, "outing".

Sullivan's personal experience tells him that his homosexuality is a real, distinct and unchosen condition which it is meaningless to describe either as a choice or a "social construct". Both the hard left and the hard right are, therefore, wrong for the same reason: they are wrong about everything else: the world they describe does not exist.

The conservatives are given an earful, in that their own combination of private tolerance and public discouragement of homosexuality – via, for example, education or the maintenance of a different age of consent than heterosexuals – is seen to have a certain consistency. But, says Sullivan, the current refusal of homosexuals to accept the implicit code of silence makes the conservatives' position redundant. Far better to adopt a more dynamic conservative position by supporting the institutional acceptance of homosexuals.

The liberals are most damningly described. Liberalism, says Sullivan, "has come ... to resemble the problem

new liberal insistence that some must be made more equal than others in order to correct any inequalities that arise. The project has failed and it has exacerbated the existing bigotry within society. Yet still its damaging terminology poisons political thought.

Sullivan has a theoretical solution and two practical proposals. He wants all discrimination against gays in the military to be removed and gay marriage to be legalised. These measures will simply give homosexuals the same legal status as heterosexuals. And they spring directly from the central theoretical position that all public discrimination against homosexuals should be ended. They should not be treated differently in any way – either as victims by liberal legislation or as abettors by conservative demands.

Simple and obvious as this point is, in the American context it is radical. For what Sullivan is really saying is that homosexuality should be depoliticised. Nobody, after all, seriously regards red hair as a political matter, yet homosexuality, in Sullivan's terms, is an equally contingent phenomenon, debated as if it were welfare spending or foreign policy. This is absurd – all that needs to be said is that there are homosexuals, and nothing within the

new liberal insistence that some must be made more equal than others in order to correct any inequalities that arise. The project has failed and it has exacerbated the existing bigotry within society. Yet still its damaging terminology poisons political thought.

Sullivan acknowledges that his programme has little chance of being adopted. The politics of the day are too corrupted by the media-driven need for public affairs to be conducted on the basis of ideas that are strong, simple and wrong. If you are gay or black you must be gay or black within the terms laid down by the soundbite debate. No other posture is allowed. Everybody must be flattened to fit in with the mindlessly puritanical demands of *Larry King Live*.

But think of the alternative, as Sullivan does in his final chapter. Think of a politics that humbly acknowledged its innate inferiority to life. Think of a politics that admitted its own incompetence and ignorance. Think of a politics that genuinely believed in its own rhetoric of freedom and in the maturity of the people to use that freedom. Think of a politics that accepted that "problems are often more sanely enjoyed than solved", that "there is reason in mystery". And then remember that what we actually have is Blackpool, a place that includes – don't kid yourself – Brighton.

Virtually Normal: an argument about homosexuality, by Andrew Sullivan, is published by Picador at £14.99.

Generation Why



by Tony Reeve and Steve Way

Sponsor a child today



and make a lifetime of difference

Ram is just eight years old. The only life she's ever known is one of hunger and poverty. And without help, this is the only life she'll ever have.

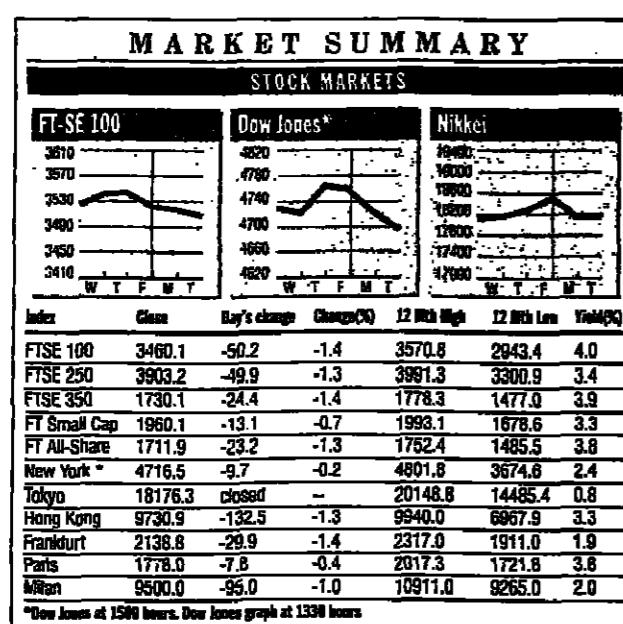
But sponsor a child through ACTIONAID, and you can give a child like Ram a better chance in life. You can help provide education – giving her hope of a better future. You can help provide clean water and proper health care – improving the health of everyone in the community.

In return for your support, you'll receive a photo and messages from the child you sponsor. You'll also see how your money is helping through regular project reports from our field workers. Please sponsor a child, and help a child like Ram.

Please sponsor a child today.

Please send me details about sponsoring a child, or call: 01460 61073.
 I am interested in sponsoring a child from a particular country.

I can't sponsor a child now, but would like to give a gift of: £ £100 £200 £500 £1000 £1500 £2000 £2500 £3000 £3500 £4000 £4500 £5000 £5500 £6000 £6500 £7000 £7500 £8000 £8500 £9000 £9500 £10000 £10500 £11000 £11500 £12000 £12500 £13000 £13500 £14000 £14500 £15000 £15500 £16000 £16500 £17000 £17500 £18000 £18500 £19000 £19500 £20000 £20500 £21000 £21500 £22000 £22500 £23000 £23500 £24000 £24500 £25000 £25500 £26000 £26500 £27000 £27500 £28000 £28500 £29000 £29500 £30000 £30500 £31000 £31500 £32000 £32500 £33000 £33500 £34000 £34500 £35000 £35500 £36000 £36500 £37000 £37500 £38000 £38500 £39000 £39500 £40000 £40500 £41000 £41500 £42000 £42500 £43000 £43500 £44000 £44500 £45000 £45500 £46000 £46500 £47000 £47500 £48000 £48500 £49000 £49500 £50000 £50500 £51000 £51500 £52000 £52500 £53000 £53500 £54000 £54500 £55000 £55500 £56000 £56500 £57000 £57500 £58000 £58500 £59000 £59500 £60000 £60500 £61000 £61500 £62000 £62500 £63000 £63500 £64000 £64500 £65000 £65500 £66000 £66500 £67000 £67500 £68000 £68500 £69000 £69500 £70000 £70500 £71000 £71500 £72000 £72500 £73000 £73500 £74000 £74500 £75000 £75500 £76000 £76500 £77000 £77500 £78000 £78500 £79000 £79500 £80000 £80500 £81000 £81500 £82000 £82500 £83000 £83500 £84000 £84500 £85000 £85500 £86000 £86500 £87000 £87500 £88000 £88500 £89000 £89500 £90000 £90500 £91000 £91500 £92000 £92500 £93000 £93500 £94000 £94500 £95000 £95500 £96000 £96500 £97000 £97500



Markets in turmoil: Worries over faltering US profits push prices down on Wall Street and in London

Recovery fear sends shares diving

TOM STEVENSON and MICHAEL MARRAY

Share prices plunged on both sides of the Atlantic yesterday to some of their worst levels in months. In London an estimated £13bn was wiped off the value of UK companies at one stage as the stock market slumped almost 70 points before rallying.

On Wall Street, a wave of selling pushed the Dow Jones index down more than 60 points as Americans worried about failing profits from a stumbling recovery. UK investors were reacting to a growing sense of crisis within the Conservative Party – and the Wall Street fall.

The Footsie was off 67.3 points by mid-afternoon. Although the index recovered, it still closed 50.2 points down at 3460.1.

Share prices on Wall Street fell sharply yesterday morning in heavy trading, as what began as investor jitters over the prospects for technology stocks widened into an across-the-board sell-off. For the second day running New York Stock Exchange limits on program trading came into effect, triggered by a near 65-point drop in the Dow Jones Industrial Average shortly after the opening bell.

By lunchtime the market had recovered some ground, but the Dow was still down by 37.21 points at 4689.01, and the Nasdaq composite index, which was 20 points down in early trading, stood at 970.90 for a loss of 13.84 points.

Market strategists played down the significance of yesterday's movement. "It's this absurd situation, with the UK market down ahead of an expected plunge on Wall Street. Then after the close the Street bounces back," one said. But he warned that any recovery later in the week would depend on how the markets reacted to key speech-

es from the Chancellor and Prime Minister in Blackpool.

Another strategist described the fall as an over-reaction, blaming a dearth of takeover news that has buoyed the market over the summer. But he said bids and a wave of consolidation in financial services had distracted from poor market fundamentals – recent weakness in the gilt market following the uncovered auction, poorer than expected economic figures and a worsening outlook for corporate earnings.

The consensus from BZW's sector analysts now points to

earnings growth this year of 11 per cent, compared with the 15 per cent expected recently. Steve Wright, the firm's UK equity analyst, believed that figure could retreat even further to maybe 8 per cent.

Analysts said markets might normally be expected to bounce back today but forecast continued uncertainty ahead of key speeches tomorrow and Friday from Kenneth Clarke and John Major, as well as inflation figures expected to rise higher.

The recent weakness of the New York market again focused on bearish sentiment in

the highly rated technology sector. Poor results from Motorola, the computer chip manufacturer, and a gloomy report from the Semiconductor Industry Association, sparked fears of a sell-off in the sector that has largely driven the rise in Wall Street this year.

Many analysts view the correction in the technology sector as overdone, and also point out that the broader market enjoyed its fastest run-up since 1987 during the first three quarters of 1995. They have been expressing caution since early summer, but have been drowned out by

the hype over the launch of Microsoft's Windows 95 operating system, and the market frenzy over offerings such as Netscape. Its share price more than doubled on its first day of trading in August. Hi-tech stocks did not fare so well in September, but the past few days have seen the first signs of panic selling by small investors, who have so far appeared blind to the risks in the market.

Investors in the US are also becoming increasingly exercised about third-quarter earnings figures due in November, which analysts believe will dis-

appoint compared with the impressive first and second quarter numbers.

This week's sell-off was triggered, in part, by Friday's announcement from Novell that its fourth-quarter earnings would fall well short of analysts' expectations, as a result of weak sales in its applications software products, which include WordPerfect. Novell said weak third-quarter sales were going to get worse in the current quarter. This announcement was made after close of trading on Friday, but was picked up on Monday morning as an excuse to start

Construction cutbacks threaten 20,000 jobs

RUSSELL HOTTEN

The construction industry yesterday warned of thousands more job losses as official figures pointed to a continuing slowdown in the sector. UK construction orders fell 2 per cent in the three months to August compared to the previous three months – prompting an attack on the government's private finance initiative for delaying recovery.

The figure was an 8 per cent decline on the June-August period in 1994, according to provisional, seasonally adjusted figures from the Department of Environment. The figures show that orders for private housing in the third quarter of 1995 fell by 19 per cent against the same period in 1994. New orders for public housing fell by 8 per cent, while other public building works dropped by 12 per cent compared with a year ago.

"Confidence in the level of construction work for the future has reached a new low," said

Richard Houghton of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. "These figures are bad news for those employed in the construction industry, but also have serious implications for the economy as a whole."

"If, as we predict, 100,000 jobs are to be lost from the industry over the next 2-3 years, the Exchequer stands to lose as much as £1bn in increased social security payments and lost revenue."

The Building Employers' Confederation warned yesterday that up to 20,000 jobs could be lost over the next six months as the industry slumps into a new recession. The organisation estimates that 480,000 building jobs have gone since 1990.

Paul Shepherd, chairman, attacked the government's private finance initiative (PFI) which requires all public sector projects to be market-tested. He said the PFI had delayed and reduced investment.

The gloom was underlined by the National Council of Build-

ing Material Producers, whose survey published yesterday showed that members had put back expectations of recovery to 1997. The BMP – with around 2,000 members – said 78 per cent of respondents were not working at satisfactory levels. In the spring, over half had reported satisfactory volumes.

The BMP forecasts a two per cent drop in UK construction output this year, with a 0.5 per cent decline in 1996 compared with 2.5 percent growth forecast previously.

The survey revealed a "picture of disaster" in the industry and blamed government failure to help the housing market, "dithering" on interest rate policy and confusion over the PFI.

The three employers' groups called for action next month's budget to stimulate construction activity. Mr Houghton said: "The government could afford to spend an extra £500m on urgently needed social housing, creating jobs without inflationary pressure."

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Newspoint warning: Rupert Murdoch addressing News Corporation's agm in Adelaide yesterday. Photograph: Greg Adams/Reuter

Shares in News Corporation fell by 12p to 324p on Mr Murdoch's newspaper predictions. "Paper costs are a worry and it is going to be some time before this turns

around." But he remained bullish about the UK, where profits are expected to rise in the year to June 1996. Mr Murdoch said: "We have great faith in our news-

paper position in Britain. We see growing profits ... if we increase our share of the market and manage to get even more competitive and efficient."

High street banking: rivals forced to consider future strategy □ directors' payouts may reach £9m in dividends and options

Lloyds merger forces rethink

JOHN WILLCOCK

Lloyds Bank will announce the details of its proposed merger with TSB this morning, driven by the prospect of £3bn of cost savings and increased revenues.

The emergence of this new banking giant is forcing a rethink across the financial services sector, as banks, building societies and insurers accelerate plans for cost cutting and acquisitions.

The Banking Insurance and Finance Union warns that 5,000 to 10,000 jobs will go over the next few years as a result of the deal. Some City analysts think that even more – up to 20,000 – will go over the next five years.

The estimated £15bn market value of Lloyds TSB is reached

only on the expectation of a massive £3bn gain from substantial cost cutting and new earnings growth. Lloyds' current market capitalisation is £9bn, that of TSB £6bn. With £1bn being handed back to shareholders in the form of the special dividend under the merger, a £3bn jump in value is being factored in by advisers.

Barclays and NatWest now face stark choices on where they go from here. Both are heavily committed to the big corporate sector, where Lloyds is a medium player and TSB nowhere. Increasingly they deal with their big corporate clients through their investment banking arms, and these operations have required huge investments.

The question is whether they can succeed in the personal sec-

tor and the corporate sector at the same time. They are competing with ever larger personal financial groups like Lloyds TSB, as well as pure investment banks like the giant Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley.

There is also a question mark over Abbey National. It was the first building society to convert to bank status in 198



"Signs of economic slowdown have been there for all to see since early summer. The outlook for corporate earnings too seems to be deteriorating, with an ever-lengthening list of profits warnings and gloomy trading statements"

Shaky equities set to slide despite takeovers

The only thing holding up the London stock market for some time now has been the hectic pace of bid activity. As yesterday's events showed, even this has become insufficient to the task. Though the takeover frenzy shows few signs of abating, the market seems set on correction mode.

The surprising thing is that it didn't happen earlier. Signs of economic slowdown have been there for all to see since early summer. The outlook for corporate earnings too seems to be deteriorating, with an ever-lengthening list of profits warnings and gloomy trading statements.

As if this were not enough, the failure of the Government's gilt auction should have sent out a siren warning of things to come. Once the final prop of Wall Street was removed, the downward shift became inevitable. The FT-SE 100 share index was 67 points off at one stage, taking its fall from the peak in September to more than 4 per cent.

Has it got further to go? Serious corrections usually take around 10 per cent of the market so the answer is very possibly yes. Sentiment is being increasingly influenced by politics and here the outlook hardly inspires confidence. The Tory Party conference is off to a disastrous start and the numbers the Chancellor has to play with in the forthcoming Budget look as uncertain as ever.

There are other worrying straws in the wind too. Eventually the Government is

going to call a halt to the takeover binge. The spectacle of UK plc being gobbled up in big cost-cutting mergers and acquisitions is for many a repugnant one.

The Lloyds takeover of TSB alone is likely to lead to the loss of up to 20,000 jobs, although you will not hear Sir Brian Pitman, chief executive of Lloyds, admitting to this when he announces details of the merger today. The Government needs headlines of this sort like it needs a hole in the head. However strong the pull of Michael Heseltine's "anything goes" mergers policy, you'd have to be away with the fairies to believe it will go on forever. The end may indeed be quite soon.

And if that goes, then the market begins to look highly vulnerable. Nick Knight, equity strategist at Nomura, may be right after all with his year-end prediction for the FT-SE of 3,200.

Tories push business into arms of foes

It comes as a shock to realise how far the political landscape has changed for business over the last 12 months. With Tory MPs demanding windfall taxes and Labour yesterday promising to work hard in partnership with industry to create defence manufacturing jobs, telling left from right is no longer an easy process. Would Lord Weinstock prefer Michael Portillo or Dr David

Clark as defence secretary? No wonder companies such as Tate & Lyle are placing each-way bets by splitting their political donations between the parties and managers everywhere are suppressing their instincts by looking sympathetically at what Labour has to offer.

A survey by the Institute of Management found 54 per cent of respondents felt the Government had lost touch with the needs of business and 63 per cent approved of Tony Blair's belief in a closer partnership between government and business.

For anyone who remembers the CBI's promise in 1981 of a bare knuckle fight with Margaret Thatcher's government, the present tension between big business and the Tories is nothing new. The irony is that Michael Heseltine changed things for the better in his three years as President of the Board of Trade. He really cared about business and actively pursued many of the ideas Labour is now trying to cannibalise.

The problem is that with business, as with so many parts of the Government's natural constituency, the Tories have simply failed to deliver on their promises. In the blitzed construction industry, which is gasping for public sector work, the failure of the private finance initiative to fill the spending gap adds insult to injury. Furthermore, the Heseltine-driven new sensitivity to the needs of industry coincides with Labour's own policy reformation, to the point that the similarities are now much more pronounced than

the differences, both at the macro-economic and micro-policy level.

Look at benchmarking, which Howard Davies, the new deputy governor of the Bank of England, refers to as the best recent idea to come out of the DTL. This is a government-aided exercise to measure the best international standards in a given industry and pass on the secret to those who are not so good, to drag up their performance. It is intervention, and its pedigree can be traced back to the National Economic Development Office that the Tories killed, but it is also cheap and effective. These days we hear as much about benchmarking from Labour as from the Tories.

Business leaders are still not convinced Labour means what it says. But the Government is saddled with the fact that for business there is at last a credible opposition.

US-style bank mergers not easily exported

Whether it is rollerblading or monster bank mergers, fashionable waves that begin in the US tend eventually to break over Britain and Europe. The Lloyds/TSB plan to combine forces to bestride the domestic financial services sector could well be the catalyst for an accelerated series of takeovers and mergers. Banks across Europe are grappling with very similar pressures to the ones that have been driving the surge of con-

solidation in US banking – a combination of capital heaped in the coffers, and an increasingly fierce battle for business in a mature market with limited scope for growth.

The pace of consolidation in the US has to a large extent been driven by deregulation, breaking down the legal barriers keeping regional banks apart – an element that is not present over here. But the competitive pressures in an overbanked market, with too much capital chasing too little business,

The US preference for share buy-backs as a way of handing back excess capital to shareholders has had limited resonance over here. Barclays has had a first, timid go, but few of its competitors appear minded to follow suit. They are too concerned about keeping the chequebook ready for a big spend. But while the pressures for domestic consolidation remain intense, it is questionable whether the American merger wave will break with any force on a European scale.

Just as investment banking is increasingly an international business, so retail banking remains fundamentally domestic, rooted in specific cultures, languages and national structures. Just look at the weak English banking penetration of Scotland, never mind the woeful experiences of British retail forays on the Continent. There may well come a time when European banking mergers become attractive, but for now the forces of consolidation are nationally driven.

Utilities: Regulator champions consumers with demand for companies to open accounts

North West Water poised to step up Norweb fight

MARY FAGAN
Industrial correspondent

North West Water is poised to launch a second renewed offer for the electricity firm Norweb, worth up to £1.2 per share if tax credits are taken into account. The water firm, which yesterday raised £140m through a rights issue and share placing, is thought to be considering adding a special dividend of about 50p to its existing offer of £10.75, or just over £1.1 in cash and shares.

North West, which is fighting Texas Energy Partners of the US for control of Norweb, declined to comment on whether or how much it might bid. But City analysts believe the offer of an extra 50p special dividend – which has tax credits – would carry a tax credit of 12.5p – will come by the end of this week.

The battle for Norweb intensified last week, when Texas

launched an increased offer of £10.85 per share, valuing Norweb at £1.74bn. Texas, a partnership between Houston Industries and Central and South West Corporation, also made it clear it was prepared to consider another counter offer.

Texas, which has yet to issue its offer document, said North West's bid is overshadowed by regulatory risks and by the water firm's lack of experience in the electricity industry.

Speculation over North West's next move intensified as Ofwat, the water industry watchdog, called on companies to explain dividend payouts to the public and to share any benefits from increased efficiencies equally between customers and shareholders.

Mr Byatt, director-general of Ofwat, said his concern is fuelled by the steady diversification of the companies away from the core water and sewage

businesses and by the potential for takeovers in the utility sector, including the bid by North West for Norweb.

He said customers should be told how much of the dividends paid to shareholders come from the water and sewage services they pay for.

Mr Byatt said: "Accounts are not simply for the City. The water companies should explain to their customers and to the public generally what returns they have made in the regulated water businesses and what they intend to do with them. There is inadequate debate on the profits made in the regulated business, the trends in its costs or on its financial returns."

Mr Byatt added: "You are probably going to see more utilities becoming part of a larger group and regulators will want to see the regulated business deliver what it ought to within its pricing limits. We

also want to see that there is no cross-subsidy, either in a financial sense or in transfer of goods and services within a parent group. They already have to account to me for the basis of their dividends. What I want now is for the companies to explain to the public what is going on."

He demanded they start with the interim reporting season, which begins with Thames Water's half-year results on 31 October.

A City analyst said: "This is a veiled threat to the companies not to announce big dividend increases unless they can prove that they are covered by the non-core parts of the operation. He does not want to see big payouts at a time of particular sensitivity [among the utilities]. For the last five years the shareholders have benefitted at the expense of customers. Now he is trying to redress the balance."



Ian Byatt: 'What I want now is for the companies to explain to the public what is going on'

Photograph: FT

Prosecution ends its marathon

NIC CICURNI

The prosecution in the case against Robert Maxwell's sons, Ian and Kevin, accused of swindling the media empire's pension funds, concluded yesterday after a marathon 77 days of court hearings and 69 witnesses.

During more than four months of complicated testimony, prosecutors have led the jury of seven women and five men through a welter of documents displayed on computer terminals and a large television screen.

Both brothers, together with Larry Trachtenberg, a former Maxwell director, are alleged to have conspired to illegally risk the assets of the funds to raise cash for the ailing dynasty.

Halfway through the prosecution case, Judge Nicholas Phillips dismissed the jury from returning a verdict on another Maxwell director, Robert Bunn, after he suffered a heart attack.

During testimony the court



Day 77

heard how Robert Maxwell acted as a one-man investment manager who made decisions for the pension fund alone.

Witnesses described him as an overbearing and domineering tyrant who browbeat his sons and employees.

He was "extremely demanding and doubly so to Kevin and Ian", said Trevor Cook, who administered the Maxwell pension funds. "I wouldn't say that there was a definite atmosphere of fear but we would incur his wrath."

Mr Richard Lissach QC formally closed the Serious Fraud Office prosecution at the Old

lawyers gave details of Maxwell's private and public companies, together with their spiralling debts and severe cash crises.

"I suspect this was a *Guinness Book of Records* excess overdraft position," said Robert Brown, a corporate banking executive from Maxwell's main bank, National Westminster.

Other witnesses told about confusion over the ownership of the shares in the Israeli companies Teva and Scitec, which form the basis of the case.

Robert Maxwell's Israeli lawyer testified that Kevin told him he was working on a rescue deal with a mystery investor after his father died.

However, senior executives from Lehman Brothers, the Wall Street firm, laughed about reports that someone was willing to invest £400m to rescue the group.

The jury is not expected to be in court until Monday next week when Kevin is expected to give evidence in his defence. The trial continues on Monday.

Nobel applauds economic revolutionary

DIANE COYLE
in Washington

The Nobel committee's decision to award its economics prize to Professor Robert Lucas of the University of Chicago will arouse far less controversy than the work he won it for.

Professor Lucas, the fifth University of Chicago economics professor to win the prize in six years, transformed macro-economic analysis. In the course of a few years, from 1976 to 1982, he set in train one of the rare revolutions in economic thought. His hypothesis of "rational expectations" provided the theoretical underpinning for the resurgence of free market economics.

The theory boils down to the beautifully simple idea that economic agents – whether individuals negotiating wages, investors buying bonds or companies making investment plans – do not systematically get their forecasts wrong. On average, people will get their predictions of inflation, and, in particular, about right. And they definitely will not be wrong more often than governments. Professor Lucas's insight



As well as an elegant theory, Robert Lucas has a charisma rare in his profession

Photograph: Reuter

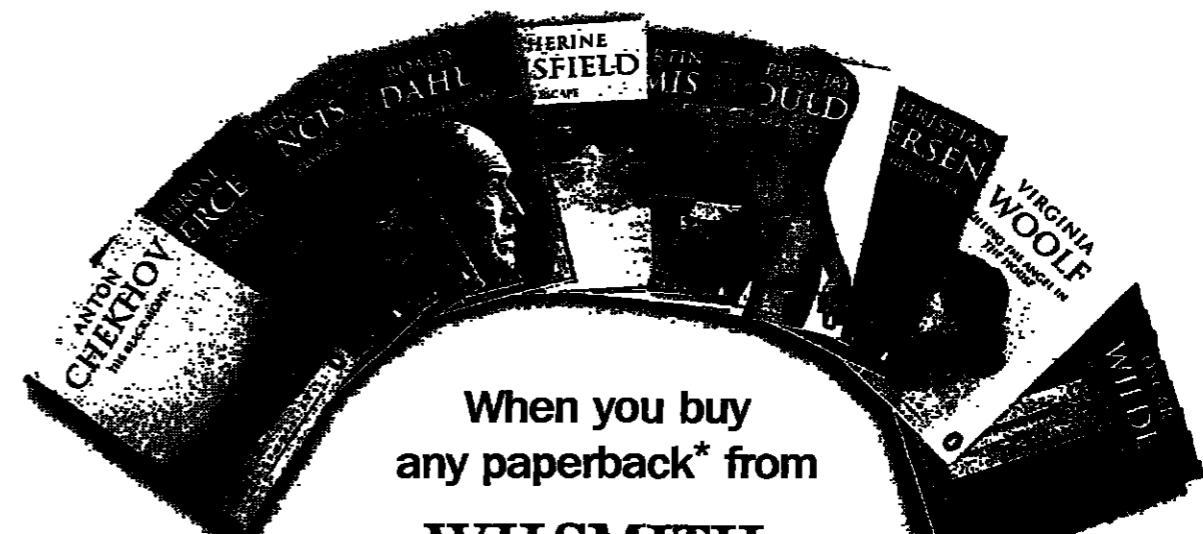
the evidence stands in the way of a powerful theory.

Even the fiercest critics of the revolution and its powerful free-market consequences accept that Professor Lucas

brought new life into macro-economic theory. But the cost of his revolution could in the end prove to be the fatal detachment of economic theory from real life.

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More selective appetite at St Ives keeps City satisfied

A 1980s spending spree left St Ives with a nasty bout of indigestion in the early 1990s. But the printer's relative abstinence since then has helped acquisitions to bed down well to create a low-cost, quick-turnaround printing operation with substantial shares of the markets in which it operates.

It is a formula that continues to please the City. Yesterday's 3.1 per cent rise in pre-tax profits to £35.5m for the year to July, after stripping out the £4.93m exceptional loss on disposals in 1994, was at the top end of expectations. That helped to send the shares strongly against the market trend yesterday to record an 11p rise to 416p.

Despite the 11 per cent increase in turnover last year, it has hardly been a boom period for St Ives. Books, where the group has about a fifth of the UK market, suffered from flat conditions for paperbacks, which were only saved by a £7m contract to print the Penguin 60s celebration series.

Likewise, it was a dull year for financial work. With close to 20 per cent of the high-security business that accompanies every big City deal, St Ives suffers when transactions are low, as in 1994-95.

Luckily the broad spread of the business helps to make up for laggards elsewhere. Magazine production volumes grew with higher pagination and new titles, including eight wins from IPC, which will go a long way to filling the capacity of the new third press at the Caerphilly plant. Meanwhile, the recovery in the US, where profits jumped from £185,000 to £1.67m, continues apace. The problems of two years ago, when medical printing work fell away under the impact of the administration's health reforms, now look a thing of the past as management focuses on profitable work.

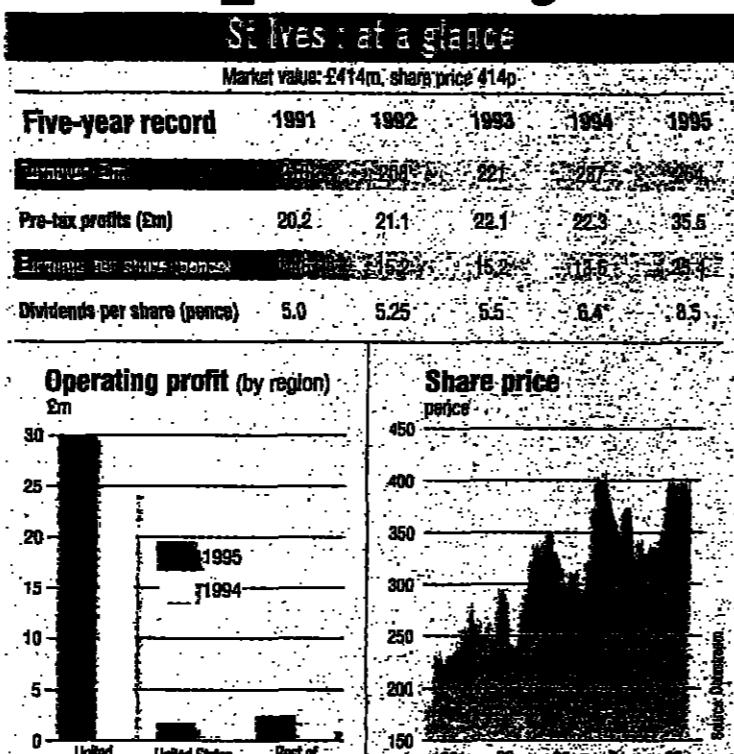
The outlook for the existing business looks set fair. Financial work, led by the outbreak of bid frenzy in the electricity sector, should be on course for a good half-year at least. Meanwhile, the final demise of the net book agreement will probably on balance benefit St Ives' customers, the big publishers of mainstream books.

But perhaps of more relevance to the shares is what St Ives does with its cash pile. Net cash is expected by analysts to be back up at £26m by the year end, despite the total £22m cost of Jöhler Druck, the German printer acquired in August, and capital expenditure of £29m this year.

Miles Emley, the chairman, has been commendably cautious in making acquisitions since his arrival from Rothschilds in 1993. Druck, which made £2.3m last year, looks a good start in Germany and more buys are likely to follow both there and in the US. Profits of £41.5m would put the shares on a prospective p/e of 15. Still reasonable value.

Market wary of Lloyds Chemists

Lloyds Chemists, Britain's second-biggest pharmacy chain, has a serious credibility problem. Despite profits broadly in line



with already refined-in expectations, the shares slipped another 12p to 230p yesterday as the market focused on a downbeat assessment of current trading and slower-than-hoped-for progress on the rebranding of its troubled drug stores operation.

It is almost as if investors are looking for reasons to sell the shares, which stand 50 per cent below their level 18 months ago. Alien Lloyd, the chairman, is reported to have had enough with the Square Mile, which he believes has always undervalued the company he founded in 1973. His annoyance is understandable – after yesterday's fall the shares trade on a massive discount to the rest of the market.

That is a pretty grudging rating for a company that has just announced a 15 per cent rise in turnover to £1.08bn, the first time it has breached the billion-pound mark. Before exceptional items of £13.4m, foreshadowed six

months ago, profits rose 5 per cent to £63m, although the one-off charge and higher interest payments resulted in a fall in reported profit before tax from £58.3m to £42.2m.

The confidence of Lloyds' management was reflected in a 7 per cent rise in the dividend to 10.2p, the ninth consecutive rise. Its optimism was driven by good results from the chemist operation, Holland & Barrett, the health shops, and the pharmaceutical and veterinary arms.

But there is no getting away from the problems facing the loss-making SuperSave drug store division. A profit of £1.3m in 1994 was reversed into a loss of £3.7m, the majority of which occurred in the second half. That would not be so worrying if the plan to convert not a third of the chain into Holland & Barrett stores or a new health and beauty format as part of the chemist chain was progressing at a de-

cent lick – but it is proving much slower than expected.

Trading has been clobbered by two developments. First the National Lottery has sucked £100m a week, 5 per cent of all non-food retail sales, out of consumers' pockets, hitting discretionary spending. Second, new laws on Sunday trading have boosted sales in out-of-town supermarkets at the expense of high street shops. Competition among those who remain in town is now intense.

Despite those worries, there is plainly a valuation anomaly in Lloyds' shares, with its 920 pharmacy licences arguably worth more than the total value of the company. On the basis of forecast profits of £38.5m this year and £66m next year the shares are valued at only 7 times 1997 earnings. That is cheap, but while the market continues to have reservations about the company's management they could well remain so.

Problems mount for Thorntons

Thorntons, the chocolate maker and retailer, has ill-served investors who climbed aboard at its 1988 stock market flotation. After a series of disappointments, the shares, down 4p yesterday, have climbed to just 149p from the 125p offer price.

The latest deflation of hopes comes as a result of a botched television advertising campaign last Christmas, compounded by a hot summer and the loss of a number of concessions in two greetings card chains. The net result was a fall in profits from £1.2m to £1.05m for the year to 24 June. The only consolation for shareholders is an 8 per cent rise in last year's total dividend to 5.3p.

At least some of the confidence that represents stems from Thorntons' decision to seek a new chief executive, whose identity will be revealed once he has sorted things out with his current employer. In the meantime, the company is a parting company with its UK managing director, David Mitchell.

The new person is said to have "extensive experience as managing director of retail businesses", but his room for manoeuvre will already be severely limited by the fact that a programme to re-orient the business has now swung into action.

Capital expenditure is being jacked up from £7.7m to £10m in the current year, half of which relates to the retail business. A refurbishment programme will see 50 shops redone by the year end, with 15 relocated. On top of this, Thorntons plans to open another 20 or so new outlets.

The structural and management changes have cost £75,000 in the latest figures. It is not clear what the future impact will be, although there may be some offset if legal action over the loss of concessions in the Carlton Card chain, taken over by Clinton Cards, is successful.

In the meantime, assuming profits recover to at least £1.2m this year, the shares stand on a prospective multiple of 12. Unattractive unless the family decides to sell out to a bidder.

Simon Pincombe CITY DIARY

Left in the air by the party conference



Stretcher case: David Whelan's 1960 Cup Final mishap did not stop him going on to score a big success with the sports retailer JJB

Photograph: Photo News Agency

With Tate & Lyle turning distinctly pinkish on the corporate donation front, the Tories will not be pleased to learn that Michael Heseltine has got up the nose of another businessman. The Deputy Prime Minister yesterday delayed David Whelan, chairman of the independent sports retailer JJB Sports, by one and a half hours on his way to London.

The problem was that Mr Whelan – the former Blackburn Rovers footballer who was stretchered off the field in the 1960 FA Cup final – was circling RAF Northolt in his executive jet at the time with the pilot looking nervously at the fuel gauge. Worse still, he brought glad tidings to the City in the shape of a stonking sum of figures.

Air traffic control were uninvolved. The Cabinet minister was flying up to the Tory party conference in Blackpool, and he was clearly a priority. Still, Mr Whelan – the former Blackburn Rovers footballer who was stretchered off the field in the 1960 FA Cup final – was circling RAF Northolt in his executive jet at the time with the pilot looking nervously at the fuel gauge. Worse still, he brought glad tidings to the City in the shape of a stonking sum of figures.

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One of the problems of selling Brazilian electricity privatisation to the City has been the high level of wastage. The system is prone to unauthorised tapping from ingenious consumers who would rather not pay for their power. It is known as the "dead cat problem", according to José Carlos Mendonça, of the Brazilian brokers Garantia (readers may find the next paragraph distressing).

It works like this. Impoverished São Paulo resident needs some juice to heat up the family supper. He goes out on the street, picks up a passing stray cat, and throws it on to the overhead cables. The result is a short circuit, which allows the power thief to clip on his personal jump leads before the current is restored.

Sadly, it's curtains for the cat.

They may be paid in guilders but the Euro-sceptic financiers – who are advising Lloyds Bank on its merger with TSB – flatly refuse to have anything to do with their Dutch overlords or their acronym. "Make sure that you call us Baring Brothers," warned one nationalist.

Expect Nick Leeson to be sprung from jail shortly.

Never one to give up the driving seat lightly, Sir Nicholas Goodison, art historian and chairman of TSB, will nevertheless adopt a more ceremonial role when the Lloyds Bank-TSB merger is announced today. The job of convincing the City falls mainly to the chief executive dream team of Sir Brian Pitman and Peter Ellwood, the hard man who joined TSB from Barclaycard.

Mr Ellwood shares Sir Brian's passion for cost-cutting, giving some credence to union warnings of huge job losses. Analysts still quiver with excitement when they recall a visit to a Barclaycard centre where Mr Ellwood unveiled his vision of a high-tech, low-wage factory.

Profile points all round for the staff if may be. But Sir Nicholas is unlikely to be robbed of TSB's impressive collection of modern art. "It will probably stay where it is," a spokesman reassures.

The dinosaurs of the Eighties, who could rack up a £600 lunch bill at the Savoy during three hours of gluttony, are all but extinct. The typical business lunch now takes just one and three-quarter hours and costs £35 a head, according to a survey for Air Miles.

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Sinking Trafalgar jettisons family jewels

Selling the Ritz is a low-water mark for a once-great firm, writes Tom Stevenson

There can be no better symbol of the depths to which Trafalgar House has fallen than the sale of the Ritz last week. Once one of Britain's leading conglomerates, only the dross of financial straits could have forced the disposal of such a uniquely prestigious trophy asset. Trafalgar is seriously on its uppers.

The disposal, to the secretive Barclay brothers, who also own the Howard Hotel, the *European* newspaper, and a string of other high-profile investments, was hardly the amiable anniversary present Nigel Rich would have chosen a year after he took up the chief executive's position at Trafalgar, even if the price he achieved was by any measure a full one.

It has been a stormy 12 months since he was installed by his former bosses, the Keswick brothers of Hong Kong's far-flung Matheson trading empire, which through its Hong Kong Land subsidiary, owns a quarter of Trafalgar's shares.

During that time, Trafalgar has had to negotiate the PR gaffe of the century, when its Cunard subsidiary foolishly sent its flagship cruiser, the QE2, on a voyage to the Caribbean only half-fitted out. It has seen its bid for Northern Electric kicked into touch by the electricity regulator, Professor Stephen Littlechild, and lost almost two-thirds of its value on the stock market.

At 29.5p, the shares are just 2p above their lowest level since 1974, which was reached last week. The epitome of the 1980s boom share, they rose almost sevenfold during that

decade under the flamboyant guidance of Sir Nigel Brookes. In the space of five years they have lost it all again and then a bit more.

Trafalgar is now valued at only a little over £300m. That is about the same as Hazlewood Foods, half as much as MFI, a fifth the market value of Next. Any further fall and Trafalgar will drop out of the FTSE Mid 250 index and into the SmallCap segment of the market.

What has gone wrong is easier to describe than to put right. Rapid expansion in the good years has left the company with a hodge-podge of assets in a range of industries whose only shared feature is lack of prospects – heavy-power engineering, construction, housebuilding and property.

Internal controls have been, by the frank admission of Mr Rich, totally inadequate for a company of Trafalgar's size and complexity. Trading is poor and cash flow worse.

Following the disposal of the Ritz, attention now turns to what else Trafalgar could sell to reduce its debts of about £250m. Although those debts are not massive in the context of its net assets, which stood at £641m in March, there are serious doubts about the valuation of many of Trafalgar's assets in its balance sheet.

Serious write-downs of value when figures for the year to September are announced just before Christmas could wipe out much of the notional worth that underpins those borrowings, making gearing more of a worry than it appears now.

Speculation surrounds the fate of the Cunard line, which is underperforming its peers dramatically. In the first six months of last year, when Trafalgar declared an unexpectedly large £48m loss, shipping chipped in £7m of red ink even before exceptional charges to do with the QE2's Christmas fiasco.

Comments from Mr Rich over the summer that it could be several years before the line produces a decent return suggest that a large write-off of its book value is likely in December. If Trafalgar still needs to raise money by disposing of assets it is, like the Ritz, an obvious "name" to put on the market.

The next two months will be crucial ones – for Trafalgar, for the reputation of Nigel Rich and for the Keswick brothers, who have made no secret of the fact that the company represented a European base for their empire following the takeover of Hong Kong by the Chinese in 1997.

Three years after they first boarded Trafalgar, they have poured more into the company in exchange for a 26 per cent holding than the whole company is now worth. As much as the financial loss, the investment represents a huge loss of face.

Talk to analysts about Trafalgar and the frustration is tangible. The company has always been short on information, but forecasting its profits is no easier now than before because so much hinges on the scale of the write-offs to come. To make matters worse, with sales of almost £5bn, the slightest movement in operating margin can generate a huge swing in profit (or loss). The City will be looking for an uncharacteristic openness about prospects and strategy when it next meets the company. The latest edition of the *Earnings Guide* shows a wide range of forecasts for the year just finished stretching from a profit of £40m to a loss of £75m.

When things are going as badly as they are at Trafalgar House it is amazing how easily you can chuck away the value of one of the world's great hotels.



Christmas turkey: The QE2's voyage to the Caribbean when only half-refurbished was the 'gaffe of the century'

Murphy in tale of rediscovery

RICHARD EDMONDSON
reports from Chepstow

Declan Murphy added a chapter to a story that will soon be retold at children's bedside here yesterday. The Irish jockey, who was close to death after a fall at Haydock 17 months ago, showed his rehabilitation is complete by winning on his comeback ride. The kids will not be disappointed.

Hospitals have provided Murphy with the defining moments of his life. He was brought into the world in the Co Limerick village of that name in 1967 and almost left it in Liverpool's Walton Hospital last May. His injuries following a fall from Arcot - multiple fractures to his skull and a blood-clot on his brain - were so severe that at one stage he was considered to be just four minutes from death. He remembers nothing of the accident and the friends and family who saw him in hospital urged him never to view the pictures that captured his condition.

There was no sign of all this on the face of the 28-year-old jockey. Murphy's memory may be impaired in several areas, but the calmness that has characterised much of his riding is still with him. After studying the card for the Flat versus Jump Jockeys Challenge in which he was a participant, he fell asleep with the rigours of race riding.

"I found the horse's cruising speed within 10 strides," he reported. "By the time I got to the half-mile pole I felt complete as a jockey. I did it instinctively and I didn't have to work at it."

"I have achieved some victories in my life but nothing is great as this. What has felt like a dream for so long has just become a reality."

Before competition, Murphy had threatened that this could be both his first ride back and the last of his career.

He has been offered a job which would take him out of the country for three or four months a year but one over which he was sworn to secrecy (the profile of a post with MI6).

Such was the exhilaration he felt here that considerations of an alternative career were soon abandoned. "I could not get off horses after that," he said. "No matter what was offered me on this planet I would not give up."

The reality is that I may be able to do this for another seven or eight years."

There were passages where Murphy was lost for words yesterday, due to the singularity of the afternoon. He refused to ponder the future too closely although he is expected to make his return to fences at Kempton on Saturday. "I don't see that as a problem because today was more difficult than any jump race I have ever ridden in," he said. "I don't want to look too far because I don't want to get off the cloud I am on right now. This has been the greatest day of my life."

One of the first to offer congratulations was his Newmarket home to the Welsh track.

When he emerged for competition with the new helmet he has helped to develop, Murphy appeared serene. It was not a false image. "He showed no nerves and I didn't give him any instructions," Geoff Lewis, who legged the jockey into Jibeseran's saddle, said. "You don't give good jockeys instructions."

If others were fearful for Murphy's health, they did not let it influence their betting, and Jibeseran started at 7-2 favourite.

Fear of defeat was all but extinguished in a matter of strides.

RICHARD EDMONDSON
NAP: Sue Me
(Haydock 3.00)
NB: Ed's Folly
(Haydock 2.00)

Murphy checked over his right shoulder before manoeuvring into first place on the rails. It was a position he was never to relinquish. It may not have been the most competitive of races and there may have been few jockeys eager to spoil the story, but that should not diminish from the achievement.

The Irishman has never let the thought that his powers may have been snuffed out enter his mind, but even he was surprised by the manner in which he immediately coped with the rigours of race riding.

"I found the horse's cruising speed within 10 strides," he reported.

HAYDOCK

2.00 Wild Humour
2.30 Incurby
3.00 Breckton Flame
3.30 Nash Terrace

GOING: Good to soft. (Good in places). STALLIES: 7f. 1m - Inside: remainder - outside. DRAW ADVANTAGE: High for 5f 1m; Low from 7f 1m to 10f 4yds.

■ Left-hand, almost flat, even course; straight of course.

Course: 1m 1f, 1m 2f, 1m 3f. Total: 1m 1f. Admissions: County Stand 51; Turners 51.5; Newton Stand 53.50 (GAPS half-price in Turners and Newton Stand). CAR PARK: Free.

SIS All races

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sport

RUGBY LEAGUE CENTENARY WORLD CUP: The man Australia fears most waits in the wings confident of wiping out past failures

Offiah plans his grand entrance

The joker in the England rugby league pack shuffles his bare feet, gingerly across the team hotel's breakfast room carpet, hobbling and yawning. All around him can sense an atmosphere that tells you that the waiting is over, business has commenced and England are on course for a storming World Cup.

Martin Offiah has remained aloof from all this. Feeling the effects of calf and ankle strains, the Wigan winger, and surely the biggest name and earner in British rugby league, has purposefully kept himself apart, biding his time with a patience that exudes complete confidence in his own ability.

"There's no point in me going through what the playing members of the team do until I know I am ready to play," he reasons, scratching his Gazzza-style peroxide crew cut. "That's why I've kept myself to myself. I reckon I should start against South Africa at the weekend. I'm almost there, but I'm not going to risk injuring myself for the whole World Cup. Not this World Cup."

Offiah's emphasis underlines the point that all the players realise that the big-time has arrived. Rugby league has suddenly become a powerful force, shaking off its apparently limited appeal to be suddenly accepted with welcoming arms.

"It's so important to win the World Cup," continues the season's leading try-scorer. "Before, it's always been a bit of a farce. It was spread over a long period of time, didn't have enough teams, had failed to create any interest. Now, it's the new dawn, and if we can win the competition it will wipe out everything that's taken place before."

As starts go, England got off to a flyer against the tournament favourites, Australia, by beating them at Wembley last Saturday. It ensures what appears to be an easier passage to the final where, barring a major upset, they are likely to face the previously dominant force of Aus-

FACE TO FACE

Ian Stafford talks to the wing-heeled wonder of England

tralia again. England would be well advised to focus on the present, and not the past.

"Well, you're dead right there," the 29-year-old agrees. "Of course, it's better to have beaten Australia, but they are such a good side that they will be confident they'll get their act together and beat us next time."

"I think beating Australia for a second, successive time, is another hurdle which we have still to clear. When we beat them in Sydney in 1988, it shattered the myth that they were unbeatable, but since then Australia always seem to win 2-1, often coming back from behind."

How a black lad from Hackney can even be discussing rugby league world cups is extraordinary. His game could quite easily have lost him to not one but two other major sports?

"Most people now only see me as a rugby league player, but I was very close to first becoming a county cricketer," Offiah reveals, smirking almost self-consciously. "I spent the summer of '84 playing for Essex second XI, roomed with Nasir Hussain and bowled Graham Gooch out in the nets. Mind you, I also got hit for six by Alastair Wells down at Hove."

Who knows, this fast bowler and useful No 8 batsman, might have become the next Ian Botham, but the lure of rugby union, encouraged by his Ipswich boarding school, and then offers from Rosslyn Park, captured the speedy winger.

"If you had told me then that I would end up playing league, I would have laughed at you," he continues. "I used to hate watching league on television. It was violent, slow and just dreadful, and we all thought it was a joke sport. It didn't have any of today's colour and dynamism."

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Instead, just when he was making people sit up and notice, and on the verge of leaving Rosslyn Park for Bath, Offiah suddenly found himself at Widnes in 1987. You would think that a young, black, East Londoner, faced with appalling racial taunts from the crowd, and the roughest, toughest game he had ever encountered, might just a little fazed by this new life. But not Offiah.

"None of it ever bothered me. The racism only made me more excited when I played, and the shock of league didn't hit me like most former union players. I think it's because I've always known what I've wanted, and always known how to get it."

Offiah, now believed to be rugby league's highest earner with a salary of more than £100,000 a year, was not a big name when he left for the north, unlike most of his ex-union contemporaries. Would he consider trying out union again, now that the barriers have been removed between the two sports?

"You've got to be kidding, haven't you?" is his instant reply. "I've been too successful in league, and the game's been too good for me. Besides, the England union internationals will be

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Jamie Redknapp (right) contributes to the conspiracy to keep the ball away from Gary Pallister (third from right) during England's training session in Norway yesterday

Photograph: David Ashdown

Venables ends experimental era

Football

GLEN MOORE
reports from Oslo

Continuity is what football managers strive for above all else. From it flows understanding, consistency and, so the theory goes, success.

However, it is also the most elusive feature of the international game. The chance of the same 11 men avoiding injury, loss of form and other domestic difficulties for a whole month is slim indeed.

It is five years since England fielded an unchanged side – it was in the first two matches under Graham Taylor. Against Norway tonight, Terry Venables is able to send out a team with only three changes – a level of continuity unsurpassed in 21 internationals since the spring of 1993.

Stuart Pearce comes in for the injured Graeme Le Saux, Paul Gascoigne's groin injury lets in Robert Lee, and Gary Pallister, injured for the draw with Colombia, replaces Steve Howey, who is himself injured.

That these changes are all enforced is significant. It appears the time for experimenting is almost over. "Given the players available I would have picked the same team if this was a competitive match," Venables said.

That suggests Gary Neville is now ahead of Rob Jones at right-back. David Seaman is confirmed as the No 1 goalkeeper, and Alan Shearer, despite failing to score for England in more than a year, re-

mains the preferred centre-forward. Paul Graeme Le Saux and Paul Gascoigne back, add Darren Anderton for Dennis Wise or Steve McManaman, and, maybe, David Platt for Jamie Redknapp, and you have Venables' ideal XI. Peter Beardsley is injured, but Nick Barmby may well retain his place when he recovers.

The positions of Barmby, Redknapp and Neville will obviously be strengthened by a good performance tonight. So will McManaman's claims. After three substitute appearances and a first start against Colombia, he has the chance to establish himself.

"It is time for me to stamp my

authority on the game," the 23-year-old said yesterday. "There are only so many times you can come on as a substitute and do well. I have been in the squad for a while and played my first full game. I should now be able to express myself. If you want to achieve things you should aim to be the star player whichever team you play for."

McManaman will start on the left. "It is not the free role I have at Liverpool. It is more of a wide-midfield-cum-winger, but it is a position I have played in many times."

"I expect him to give us good performance tonight. So will McManaman's claims. After three substitute appearances and a first start against Colombia, he has the chance to establish himself.

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I know all about George Graham and that Hauge is not a licensed agent. But that doesn't mean I can't ask him for advice. I used an official Danish Fifa agent and he can use anybody he wants for advice. It's not illegal, Blackburn cannot be fined or suspended or anything like that."

A Fifa spokesman, Keith Cooper, confirmed that the world governing body are waiting for the documentation regarding the Bohinen transfer to reach them. "You should not build this up too much," he said.

"We've simply become aware through the media that a certain person – Rune Hauge – appears to be involved in this deal. We need to find out how

directly he was involved. If the player went to Hauge and asked him to negotiate the transfer and Hauge said, 'No, I can't be because I'm not allowed to, so I suggest you deal with another agent', we can't hold anything against Mr Hauge. That would have been the absolute correct and honest thing to do."

Forest meanwhile, are giving a month's trial to the Portuguese international Antonio Pacheco. The 29-year-old, twice a European Cup finalist with Benfica, is available on a free transfer, having bought out his contract with Sporting Lisbon.

The former England defender Russell Osman is to sue Bristol City for wrongful dis-

missal – citing the fact that they have not improved since he left. Osman was originally thought to have come to an out of court settlement with the club after planning to take them to a tribunal following his sacking as manager last November.

But, last night, Osman announced he was to sue the club to recover money he believes is due to him under the contract he had at the Second Division club. He still had 19 months of his contract to run when he was dismissed.

The Newcastle striker Paul Kitson will be out of action for the next six weeks after undergoing an operation for a hernia injury yesterday.

And even if they are telling the truth it does not mean Venables was not approached. A third party could well have inquired as to his availability with, or without, the knowledge of Inter. This is the most likely situation.

The weekend report that Venables was approached by Internazionale has been swiftly followed by a denial from the Italian club. However, the Italians have good reason to deny the story: they are expected to appoint Roy Hodgson, Switzerland's English-born coach, as their new coach tomorrow.

Whatever the truth, and Venables said he would discuss the issue further after this match, attitudes within the FA are unlikely to change.

The team themselves seem unconcerned. They are concentrating on what is only their second away match under Venables. The first, in Dublin, never reached half-time but, in the 27 minutes played, England looked very uncomfortable

at the back. Similar problems had appeared during travels with his predecessor; of their last 12 completed matches overseas England have won only in San Marino and Turkey.

"Playing away gives me a chance to find out if we enjoy defending," Venables said. "At Wembley we have to deal with counter-attacking. Here is a team that will take the game to us."

Norway, who include six Premiership players, will be a stern test. Although their fourth place in the world standings makes a mockery of that list, they are effective and organised.

They give a debut to 20-year-old Tore Flo, the younger brother of Newcastle United's Jostein, but are otherwise experienced. This is a side that has developed together. Every other player has at least 20 caps and, apart from Flo, and 32-year-old Erik Thorstvedt, all are aged 25 to 29, the peak years for a footballer.

England could be in a similar position in a few years' time. For now several members of the team are still learning and they will be happy with a draw. It should not be beyond them.

Barry Lavelty, St Mirren's Scotland Under-21 striker, has failed a random drugs test carried out by the club. But Lavelty will escape punishment by the Scottish Football Association as the drug is not performance-enhancing. "It is a social drug," said his manager, Jimmy Bone, said.

The former England striker Clive Allen is on the look-out for his 11th club after being released following just three appearances for Carlisle United in the Second Division.

Birmingham have signed the teenage winger Steve Barnes for £70,000 from the Vauxhall Conference side Welling, from whom they also signed Steve Finnan, now a first-team regular.

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The introduction of Sir John Hall's millions into Newcastle is the principal cause of Wheeler's concern, making it a neat irony that the clubs are using Sir John's business acumen in their various negotiations.

The clubs see entry into a European competition next season as an essential means of underwriting professionalism and are concerned that the tension souring relations between the RFU and the rest of the Five Nations may yet block English participation.

"I'm not sure whether the European competition isn't just a pawn in the RFU's game," Wheeler said. "But we need to persevere because of the income it can generate, even if the union doesn't like the way it is set up."

Hauge involved in Bohinen transfer

Lars Bohinen, who lines up for Norway against England in Oslo tonight, yesterday admitted that the controversial agent Rune Hauge, whose "gifts" brought George Graham down at Arsenal, was heavily involved in his cut-price £750,000 move from Nottingham Forest to Blackburn.

The Football Association are preparing to forward details of the move to Fifa for their inspection. "There is nothing illegal or anything for Blackburn to worry about," Bohinen said. "It was natural for me to speak to him for different reasons – he's Norwegian, he has done all the Norwegian transfers to English football for the last 10 years and he's very good at this game.

I know all about George Graham and that Hauge is not a licensed agent. But that doesn't mean I can't ask him for advice. I used an official Danish Fifa agent and he can use anybody he wants for advice. It's not illegal, Blackburn cannot be fined or suspended or anything like that."

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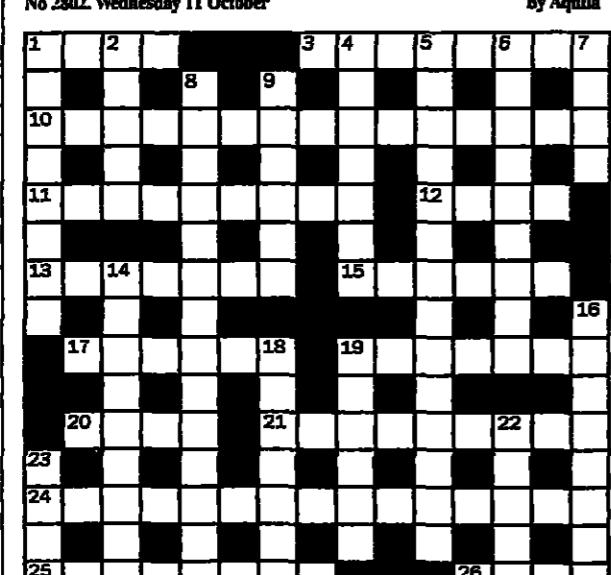
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THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No 2802, Wednesday 11 October

By Aquila

Today's Solution



ACROSS

- 1 Home fixture for City (4)
- 3 Standard fails badly in Wagner work (8)
- 10 Night drug, please, to be made up (8-7)
- 11 Heavenly time! (9)
- 12 Leicester undeveloped, almost? (4)
- 13 Government department feed NEC badly (7)
- 15 Twigg's pub in divine situation (6)
- 17 Ingredient of hummus, a thin mixture, put before one (6)
- 19 Party-leader feels bitter these days? (7)
- 20 Youth, for example, lies about (4)
- 21 Severely criticise a bank-cashier, say, with a cigar (9)
- 24 One takes all the time in the world (15)
- 25 Destination, having driven in the Cotswards? (5-3)
- 26 Bird in the water, naturally (4)
- 7 Doh in the French style of stringed instrument (4)
- 8 It happens price is affected in the training period (14)
- 9 Popular team incarcerated (6)
- 14 Some paving the way in fog-lane, maybe? (9)
- 16 Test, rain affected, is put into difficulties (8)
- 18 Ask earnestly for fairy-tales? (7)
- 19 Pair of names in Open reaching flag? (6)
- 22 Oriel floundering in river? (5)
- 23 Weekly pay unopened for a very long time? (4)

Racing

RICHARD EDMONDSON AND SUE MONTGOMERY

Lammtarra's brief and brilliant career is over. The chestnut colt who has compiled a racing record equalled only by the great Mill Reef was yesterday retired to stud.

The three-year-old is to stand at Newmarket's Dalham Hall Stud, but what is British breeders' gain is very much the punters' loss. Lammtarra has had the shortest career (9min 53.8sec) of any champion racehorse. After winning his only start at two, he captured the half-mast treble of the Derby, the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes and the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe on his only three starts this season. He was expected to prove his powers further in the Breeders' Cup

On the surface it is a shame he won't be racing again for the people. They won't get the opportunity to see more of him, but he really did not have that much more to prove. He won the three best races in the world and he beat all the best horses around. In his work and races he gave everything he had. He was a willing horse."

As the season progressed,

however, tales of Lammtarra's

increasing intractability began to emerge from Newmarket. Some flesh was put on these rumours when the colt behaved

erratically before the Arc. Godolphin insisted, though, that this had little to do with the horse's retirement. "His temperament did not come into the equation," Crisford said.

Lammtarra's breeding is not suspect though. His sire was Nijinsky, a son of the legendary stallion Northern Dancer, and his dam was Snow Bride, who won the Oaks. He will command a substantial fee to consort with around 50 of the world's choicest broodmares next spring.

By comparison, Nashwan, the 1989 Derby winner, has a £40,000 fee and Sadler's Wells, the most expensive stallion in Europe, costs upwards of £100,000.

But only five per cent of horses, no matter how well-bred or talented, make it as stallions and Lammtarra will have to start from scratch in his new career.

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There had been rumours

that the death of leading com-

mission member Prof Manfred

Donike might affect federation

policy on the Modahl case.

Modahl's husband, Vicente, and a medical expert, Professor Simon Gaskill, will be in Paris today hoping to persuade IAAF officials to inspect scientific evi-

dence which led to a British

Athletic Federation panel up-

holding Modahl's appeal

against a four-year ban in July.

Diane Modahl, who gave

birth to a girl, Imani, on Sunday

night, will, as expected, be re-

quired to submit her doping case

to IAAF arbitration, whose dop-

ing commission, meeting in Paris

this week, has endorsed the de-

cision, taken in August by the full

Commission.

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